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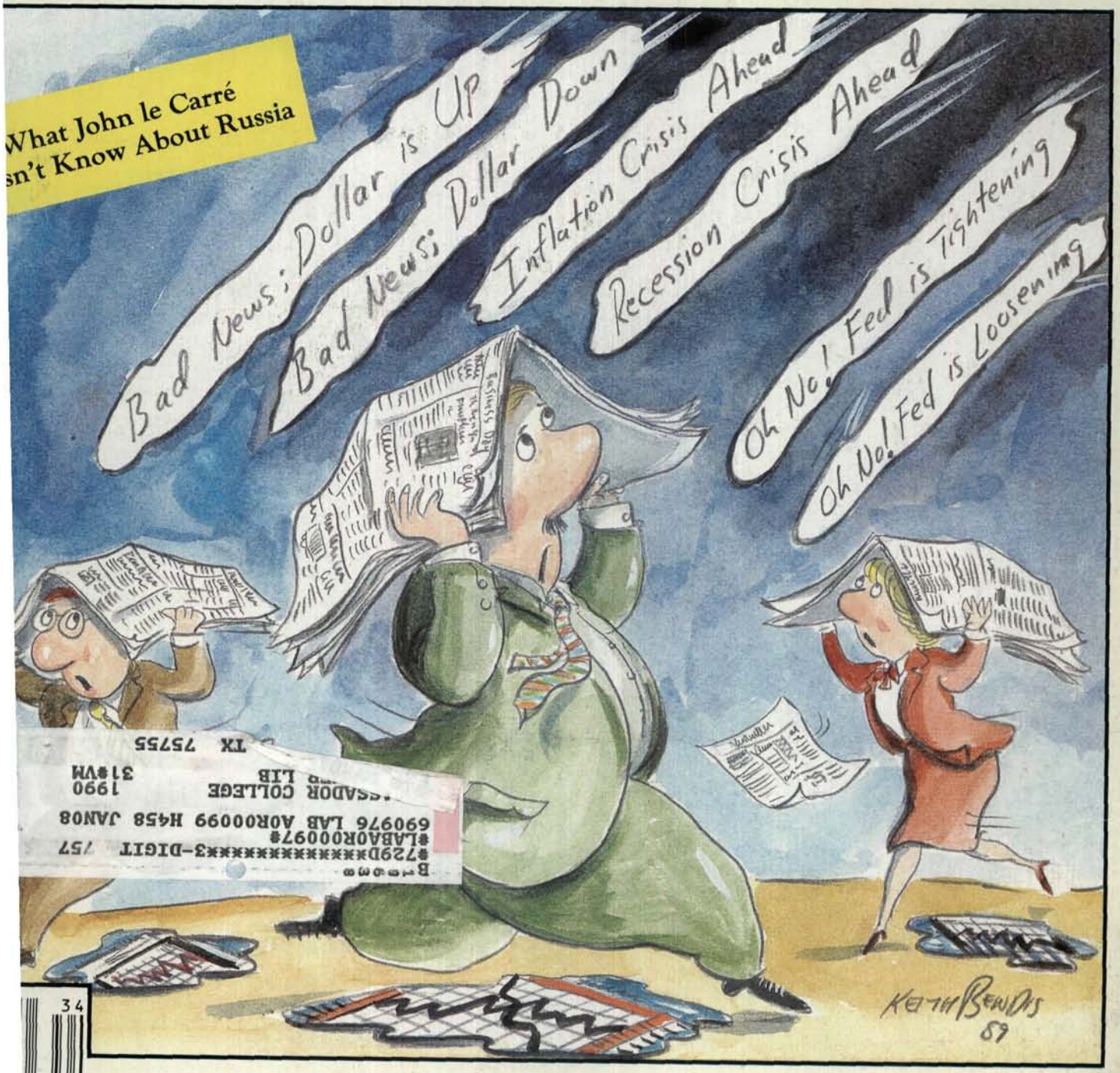
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KEITH BENDIS 89

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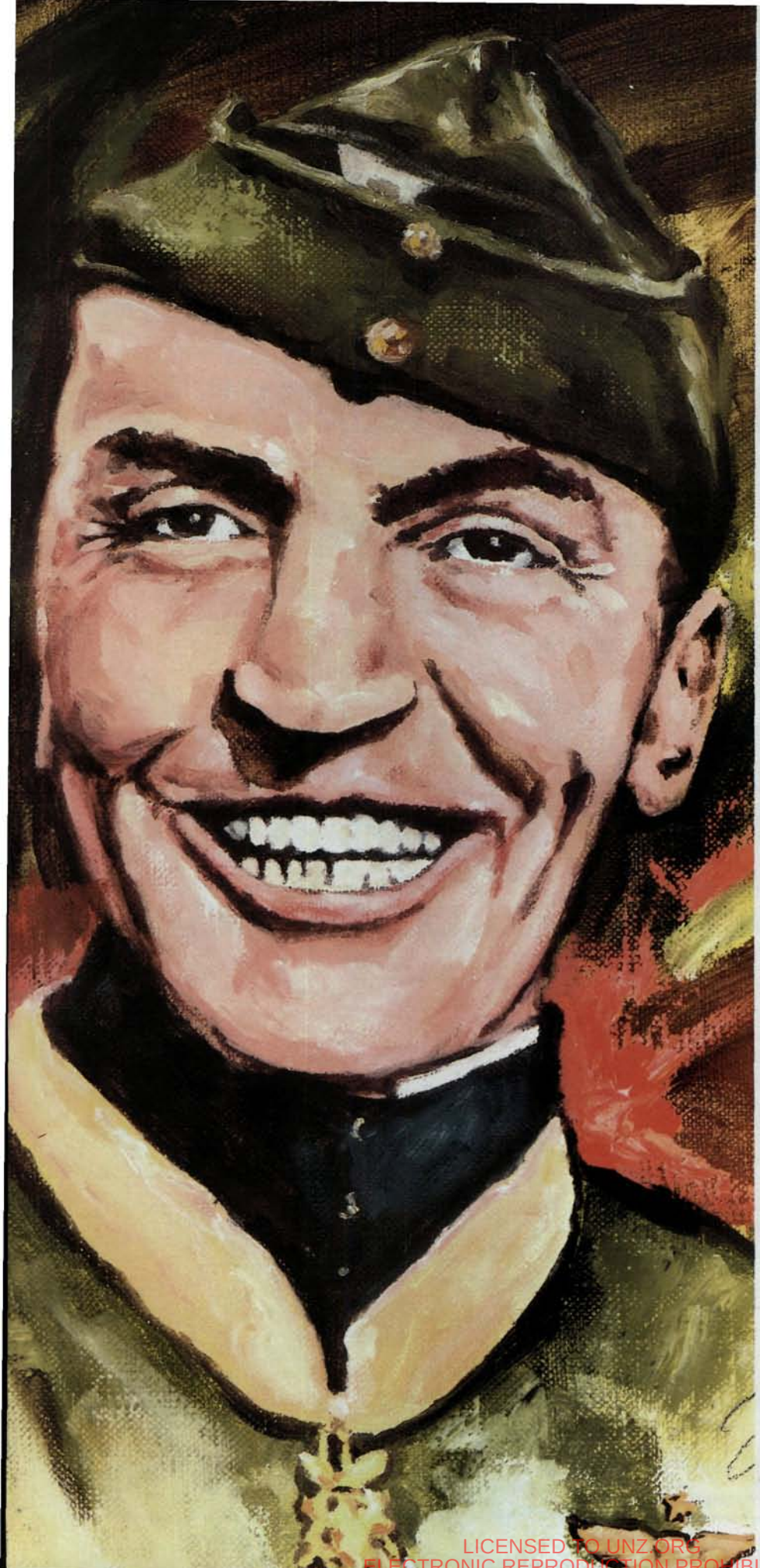

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AUGUST 21, 1989

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CORRESPONDENCE

Bearing In Mind

To the editors:

David Bloom and Neil Bennett ("Future Shock," June 19) are two authors of the world famous "Harvard-Yale study" regarding very low prospective marriage rates for white college women. World famous and dead wrong. The much lower Census Bureau estimates, which they disputed at the time, are now acknowledged to be the valid ones. Now they say, in the context of my book *The Birth Dearth*, "Fears of an American birth dearth are largely unfounded. More babies were born in the United States in 1988 than in any year since the end of the baby boom. And the Census Bureau now projects that even if American women continue to reproduce at their present moderate rate, the population won't start to decline for half a century."

Unfounded? The new Census projections confirm the general projections in my book. For the first time the official data agency of the U.S. government is showing actual population decline in its "most likely" series of projections. And as Bloom and Bennett must know, more babies were born in 1988 because baby boom babies are now at the peak of their own childbearing years, not because fertility rates are up. Our fertility rate is, in fact, still well below the replacement level. The birth dearth lives. Alas.

BEN J. WATTENBERG
Washington, D.C.

David Bloom and Neil Bennett reply:

Our marriage study rubs Mr. Wattenberg the wrong way only because it doesn't jibe with his ideological slant. Others who take a more scientific approach to evaluating the merits of research think differently. Our study is being published this November in the *American Journal of Sociology*.

It's time to let go of the notion of a U.S. birth dearth. Yes, the Census Bureau's "most likely" series of projections suggests a population decline, as we acknowledged, but not for 50 years. Moreover, the assertion that fertility rates haven't increased is plainly incorrect. The average number of children a woman is expected to have by the end of her childbearing years is up five percent in just the last two years (from 1.84 to 1.93), to within a whisker of replacement fertility. This increase was not anticipated by the Census Bureau and renders the possibility of a birth dearth ever more remote.

Tumblebush

To the editors:

I am tired of seeing George Bush misquoted. With regard to the Tom Foley memorandum, Bush did *not* say, "It's against everything I've tried to stand for in political life" ("Mission Accomplished" by Fred Barnes, July 3). He said, "*I hope* it's against everything I've ever tried to stand for in political life." I hope so, too. But I doubt it.

LINDA DAY EVANS
Crozet, Virginia

Striking Features

To the editors:

Like Thomas Geoghegan ("Glory Days," May 29), we are labor lawyers who work with local unions. His tale of woe simply isn't a fair picture. Sure, strikes don't work as well as they used to, but there are many other lawful weapons for unions to use. Union "corporate campaigns" (in which employees pressure the employer through institutions that support it, such as suppliers, customers, lenders, regulators) can be pulled off at the local level; just showing a banker how a strike is threatening the credit-worthiness of the employer can contribute to a strike's success. The new union tactics do not mean that "the rank and file stay home and send out their lawyers." They mean the rank and file get involved using old-fashioned free speech.

Geoghegan contends that strikes don't work because there are so many unemployed people available to break them. But there were a lot more unemployed during the Depression, when many strikes were won and unions grew rapidly. The secondary boycott provisions of the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act, however, limited employees in the ways they could pressure those who support their employer. Narrowing the field of conflict to the individual workplace makes strikes harder to win. But many unions are still successfully advancing the interests of working people instead of dreaming about the "glory days" gone by.

ANDREW J. KAHN
RICHARD G. MCCRACKEN
San Francisco, California

Through The Wringer

To the editors:

My thanks to THE NEW REPUBLIC for its

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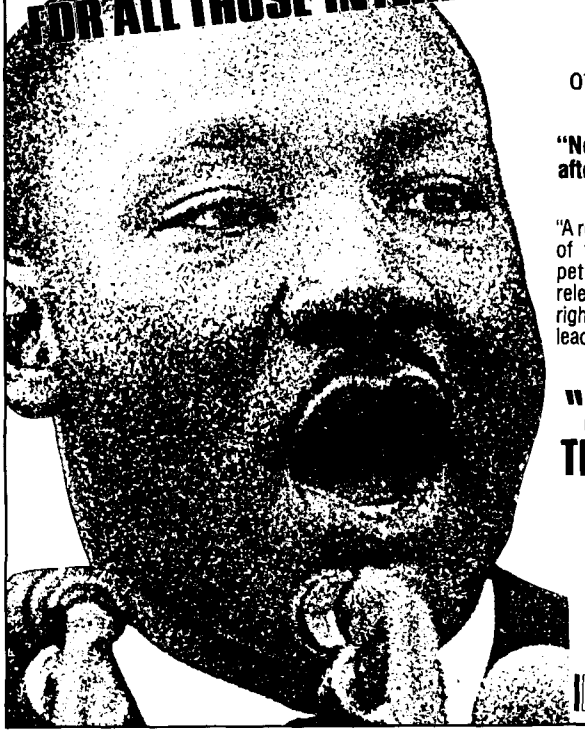
ESSENTIAL READING
FOR ALL THOSE INTERESTED IN CIVIL RIGHTS."



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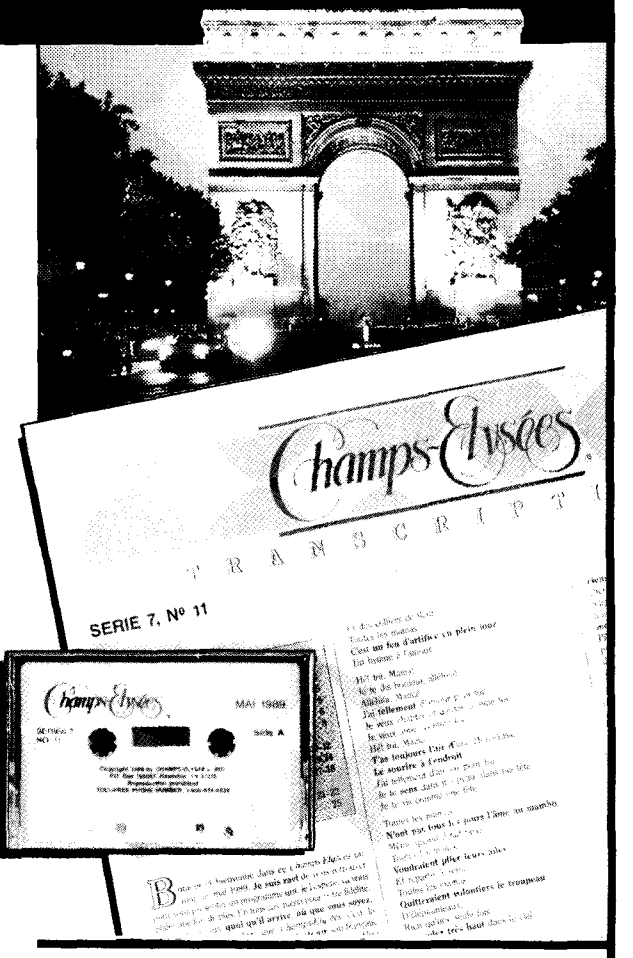

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TRB®
FROM WASHINGTON

Tea and Toleration

During the debate over Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* in Britain, the Archbishop of Canterbury suggested that the blasphemy laws should be expanded to include insults against Islam. Blasphemy laws? Yes, in Britain it's illegal to insult Christianity. You can go to jail, although no one has gone for many years.

But courts do regularly stop newspapers from publishing information the government considers dangerous to national security, or even information relating to matters under government investigation. A pending reform of the notorious Official Secrets Act would eliminate some of its worst absurdities (such as making it illegal to publish the menu in a government cafeteria), but would also eliminate any defense that publication of leaked government information serves the public interest.

Mrs. Thatcher is planning to abolish the right against self-incrimination. It is illegal for television to show the IRA or its supporters advocating their side of the Irish question. At the *Economist*, where I worked for the first half of this year, we got a lecture from a libel lawyer that would curdle an American journalist's blood. Leading political figures regularly sue and regularly win large piles of money; newspapers self-censor or settle out of court to avoid ruinous expense, even if they know they're right. (In Britain, journalists live in dread of lawsuits while every other profession is relatively protected. In America, it's the other way around.)

There is a growing movement in Britain for some kind of Bill of Rights. They certainly need one. On the other hand, returning home last month I came back to controversies over art exhibits and television shows that would be unthinkable in Britain. In some ways, despite their repressive laws, the British are freer than we are. Their legal system is less tolerant than ours of free expression, dissent, and nonconformity. But their culture is more tolerant. Which is more important?

In London I saw a play (David Hare's *The Secret Rapture*) full of harangues about the evils of Thatcherism; another (Alan Bennett's *Single Spies*) taking a benign view of treason; and two (Harold Pinter's *Mountain Language* and Howard Brenton's *The Churchill Play*) suggesting that modern Britain is no better than a concentration camp. All that plus lots of nudity and crudity. And all at government-subsidized theaters—now (thanks to Thatcher) prominently featuring corporate sponsorship as well.

Several critics pointed out the irony of plays accusing the government of tyranny being performed with a government subsidy, and suggested delicately that this may mean the playwrights have it wrong about modern Britain. But none argued that the government and corporations ought to withdraw their support. Meanwhile in Washington, in April, the Kennedy Center turned down a satire on Iranamok by the writer of the TV show "M*A*S*H." "Not appropriate," they said, because the Kennedy Center is "too dependent on the government."

Imagine a cartoon on page one of the nation's stuffiest newspaper making a joke of the fact that the acronym for "Foreign Office" is also that of an obscene insult. You wouldn't find it in the *New York Times*; it was in the *Independent* in June. The mildly smutty and politically controversial TV shows that have advertisers here fleeing wouldn't cause a second glance in Britain.

As many have pointed out in the debate over Robert Mapplethorpe, the obscene photographer, no artist has a First Amendment right to a government subsidy. Denying him one is not censorship. The same is true of corporate support, whether through contributions or advertisements. Moreover, there is no reason the government or commercial interests should be expected to support exercises of free expression that offend the majority of people. But there is good reason for concern if the spectrum of what the majority is prepared to tolerate—if not approve—is narrowing.

In any case, the government is not just refusing to fund offensive artwork. It is starting to use its considerable leverage to punish those who gave offense. The Senate has voted to ban the two organizations that sponsored Mapplethorpe and Andres Serrano (the crucifix-in-a-bottle-of-urine man) from getting *any* Arts Endowment grant for any project for five years. The Illinois Senate has cut off funds for an arts group that merely sided with the Art Institute of Chicago in a dispute over an exhibit involving the American flag.

Actually, what may be stifling our culture is not so much the growing intolerance of the majority as it is the growing influence of an intolerant minority. Although there is some dispute about whether she actually succeeded in persuading any advertisers to pull their commercials, Mrs. Terry Rakolta of Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, seems to have succeeded in getting Fox Television to tone down the vulgar sitcom "Married . . . With Children." The Rev. Donald Wildmon got Pepsi to cancel an ad featuring Madonna. "People at the networks are frightened. They're tucking tail. They're intimidated," Steven Bochco, the producer of "L.A. Law" and "Hill Street Blues," told the *New York Times*.

But "Married . . . With Children" wasn't suffering in the ratings, and Pepsi wasn't concerned that Madonna couldn't move the product. The problem is not a lack of people who wanted to see these things. The problem is people who don't want to see these things and don't want other people to see them, either. Yes, there is the question of protecting children. But children can become an all-purpose excuse for what is really a general attempt to narrow the bounds of cultural expression. (Why couldn't Mrs. Rakolta just change the channel when material that offended her came on television? She told *Rolling Stone* it was because she was on her exercise treadmill at the time.)

The House and Senate have both passed bills exempting the television networks from the antitrust laws so they can work together to create uniform standards on matters such as sex and violence. Obviously if the vast audience was demanding that television tone itself down, there would be no need for an antitrust exemption. Market forces would lead the networks to give people what they want. It is only in order to ignore market forces—that is, in order *not* to give people what they want—that each network needs to make sure in advance that all the others will go along.

Why British people are more likely to shrug off cultural manifestations they don't like, and why vociferous minorities there seem to have less veto power over the majority's cultural tolerance, are questions for wild sociological speculation. But you would be unlikely to read in a British publication a sentence like this one from the current *Newsweek*, about the Arts Endowment grant process: "Defenders argue that this system has a superb track record: out of 85,000 grants, only one quarter of one tenth of 1 percent have proved controversial." Superb? Any arts funding program that can't generate more controversy than that is a waste of money. •

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THE NEW REPUBLIC
AUGUST 21, 1989

Abolish HUD

"HUD Secretary Samuel R. Pierce Jr., the Reagan Cabinet member who probably most effectively has transformed the Reagan mandate into reality." —Heritage Foundation, *Mandate for Leadership III* (1989)

Well, that's one view. The HUD scandal has since provided another: Pierce as an apathetic, inept, and generally clueless Cabinet member. It is this view that gets our vote. But the HUD scandal is not entirely Pierce's fault. It is the fault of a fundamentally misconceived government housing system that greedy Reaganites chose to milk rather than reform.

The trouble with HUD, scandals apart, is that it is a mishmash of programs that help some very poor and some fairly poor people at random, while supplying no housing help at all to most of the people who need it. By supplying housing itself rather than the means to buy housing—and by usually insisting on doing this through "incentives" to "the private sector"—the government wastes money, creates slums, enriches a few business people, and invites corruption.

Conservatives have a pet solution for all of this, and it's the right one: housing "vouchers" that would work like food stamps, allowing people to find their own housing and allowing the market to supply it. With a universal voucher system, HUD would barely need to exist. But conservatives are dishonest about vouchers. They tout the benefits, but aren't prepared to pay the cost. A voucher system that guaranteed decent housing to every deserving American would cost more than the current HUD mess, not less. We're for it. Are you, Secretary Kemp?

Under Pierce, HUD combined a dinky voucher program with massive cuts in future housing commitments—cuts that, unless reversed, will by the middle of the next decade make today's homelessness problem seem relatively minor. About 80,000 of the five million families that receive federal rental assistance now get it in the form of vouchers. The family is supposed to chip in no more than 30 percent of its income (income includes welfare payments). Actually, even before Pierce, HUD was handing out quasi-vouchers that did roughly this, but he brought two key changes. First, a family can rent any apartment it wants, though it only gets the difference between 30 percent of its income and "fair market rent." Second, if the rent is below that market level, the family keeps the difference.

On aesthetic grounds alone, vouchers are preferable to the ungainly edifice of subsidies to landlords and developers. More important, they are superior on grounds of efficiency. They turn low-income renters into an army of deputies who monitor government spending. Their collective, self-interested discretion amounts to an invisible hand that decides whether the housing needs of the poor are most cheaply met through new construction, existing units, moderate rehabilitation, major rehabilitation, etc. (And, after all, adequate housing for low rent is more likely to be found in an old building than a new one.) Studies confirm the obvious: on a per-household basis, the voucher system is much cheaper, all subsidies considered, than having the government pour money into mega-projects of its own choosing. This is true even when the officials choosing those mega-projects are trying their damnedest to serve the public interest. It is doubly true when, as under Pierce, officials drop all pretenses of public spiritedness and simply direct money toward old acquaintances.

The case for vouchers appears even stronger in light of the present state of inner-city housing projects. These monuments to centralized planning have become breeding grounds for social pathology and impediments to racial integration. The Sam Pierce/Jack Kemp approach to cleaning up projects—letting tenant groups own or manage them—has been widely celebrated, but so far the evidence that it works is sparse, anecdotal, and dubious. Vouchers would provide a great service if all they did was disperse residents among more stable neighborhoods.

Opponents of a universal voucher system warn that in some cities housing markets are tight and turnover low. Adding directly to the housing stock, they say, makes more sense because the problem is a lack of affordable

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housing, not low incomes themselves. This is a silly distinction. The problem is the gap between the rents being charged and the resources of the renters. That gap can be bridged either by lowering the former or by raising the latter. The only question is which is more efficient. The answer is: vouchers. Some landlords may shut out voucher-bearing renters (even if this is illegal). But as long as these vouchers are redeemable in U.S. currency, there will be entrepreneurs to honor them, if all of human history is any guide. And incidentally: in most tight housing markets (New York, Boston, Los Angeles) the chief culprit is rent control. The federal government should withhold all housing subsidies from municipalities that persist in this archaic corruption of liberalism.

For all of Pierce's talk about vouchers, they weren't at the heart of his agenda. While he was handing them out to a few households, he was cutting other forms of housing assistance much faster. He did this in a typical Reaganite manner: on the layaway plan. Because many housing subsidies are handled through long-term government rent-guarantees to developers or landlords, virtually none of Pierce's cuts had been felt by the time he left office. But in 1991 alone, 300,000 extra families will find themselves suddenly without government support, and the numbers will be comparable in subsequent years. The 80,000 new vouchers Pierce is so proud of won't be much consolation.

HUD traditionally has served fewer than half the families whose income is low enough to qualify for aid (an income less than half of the median). The rest wait in line. Expanding coverage to all who qualify won't be cheap, even via vouchers, but it is necessary.

Why? Most American housing is subsidized, usually through tax breaks. When asked why the government should pay just about everyone to live somewhere, politicians generally mutter something about the American dream and the wholesome social effects of homeowning. And maybe, indeed, secure housing does have some positive externalities, some benefits that accrue to society as a whole. But it is only at lower income levels that these externalities become undeniable. To take the simplest example: filthy bodies on sewer grates disturb passers-by. Even many people who don't give money to homeless beggars would be willing to spend a few tax dollars to get them off the streets. Homelessness and shoddy housing foment drug abuse, contagious disease, and other bad things. There is also the frankly paternalistic but nonetheless valid rationale for housing aid: the government appreciates better than many poor people the benefits to them and their children of spending money on good housing as opposed to, say, good cigarettes.

The politically unpalatable upshot of this argument is that the housing subsidies enjoyed by the upper classes should be redirected downward. Excluding from tax deduction the interest on that part of a home mortgage above $200,000 would affect very few people, most of them only mildly. Yet it would yield enough money—$2 billion a year—to provide for the half million low-income households that Pierce has slated for eviction by the end of 1992. Through more politically painful, but no less justified, cuts in middle- and upper-class housing subsidies, we could cough up the money that, according to the Congressional Budget Office, would be required to move from the present assortment of subsidies (total around $15 billion a year, excluding tax breaks) to a system in which every family eligible for assistance was offered a fully funded voucher. The total cost: around $26 billion.

The only legitimate fear of giving vouchers to all low-income families is that it will work. It will guarantee decent housing for people who make little or no money, and this, like any such aid, may reduce the incentive to work. Genuine workfare—the very good idea that every able-bodied person should either work or face a cutoff of welfare—is probably two or three rounds of welfare "reform" away from becoming reality. When it finally arrives, housing aid should be as conditional as all other aid (and supplying it through vouchers will make this condition easier to administer).

A dominant theme of Reaganism was the need to reach public goals via the private sector. This is a nice idea, but it was often vulgarized to mean paying private companies to do things that the government could have done more cheaply and conscientiously. Among Pierce's initiatives, for example, was a mortgage "co-insurance program" that let private underwriters decide which mortgages the government would back, while burdening those underwriters with only 20 percent of the risk of default. At last count the program had lost $1 billion.

Anytime it's worth someone's while to pay James Watt $400,000 for a few phone calls, that's a sign that the wrong kind of privatization is going on. The right kind of privatization can work in housing, but only if we're prepared to pay for it.

Kidnapping and Peace

The Bush administration never wanted to have to think about the hostages. It hoped that it would be enough for some State Department functionary occasionally to reassure their families of official concern. The real offense of the Israelis, then, is that they take the fight against terrorism seriously. Of course, for them it's an urgent matter. They have to take risks and exact retribution. Otherwise the neighborhood in which they live, unpleasant in the best of circumstances, would become intolerable for them, just as it has become intolerable for millions of Lebanese who have no concrete way to threaten the perpetrators of the ongoing inter-Arab fratricide.

This does not mean that the Israelis don't sometimes miscalculate. The man they kidnapped on July 28, Sheik Abdul Karim Obeid, is central to the terrorist network but maybe not central enough for the Hezbollah to trade living assets—the hostages—for his freedom. But

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he clearly does know a lot. It's still possible, therefore, that a deal will be struck—a messy, morally compromising deal that would liberate captured Israeli soldiers and other prisoners of terrorism. If that were to happen—if it had happened before Colonel Higgins was murdered (if indeed he was not murdered until *after* the abduction of Obeid, for which there is no good evidence), the Israeli operation would be thought a triumph. Then even the quick and stupid tongue of Senator Robert Dole would be silent.

In the event, however, Dole was not alone in his rush to reproach. Immediately after Obeid was seized, President Bush delivered one of his shallowest non sequiturs: "I don't think kidnapping and violence helps [sic] the cause of peace." It's just possible that these words led the Hezbollah—discerning the chance to drive a bigger wedge between Israel and the United States—to play their ghoulish Higgins card. Such banal sentiments are what fill the president's brain and dictate his policy—as if his strenuous appeasement of Syria has shown any sign of doing what he says kidnapping and violence don't.

"Good will begets good will" is a nice truism, but it hasn't much application in the Middle East. It certainly has never worked on Syria's Hafez Assad, who for years has abetted terrorism even by those he is quarreling with. The role of Syria, the occupying power, in the unfolding hostage tragedy is certainly more salient here than that of the distant and demoralized Iranians, who have barely been keeping up with their payments to Khomeini's orphaned Lebanese acolytes.

The harsh truth is there is no reasoning with these folk, particularly not the faithful of Jibchit, the terrorist crossroads of which Obeid was what we euphemistically call "spiritual leader." This town claims a greater proportion of *sayyids* (direct descendants of the Prophet) than any in the environs, which has made the locals even more truculent and resistant to compromise. Still, affected neighbors—and responsible great powers—can't forfeit the right to try to modify behavior. In the end this will probably require another massive use of military power, and perhaps another. Israel carried Obeid off from his home as a preferred alternative to more bloodshed.

The Hezbollah could be certain of one thing: the Israelis would not kill Obeid once they had him in custody. This is paradigmatic of those other asymmetries that embolden terrorists. The question is: Just how handicapped must the democratic victims of terror consent to be? It's telling that the Shiite fanatics chose to make a symbol not of their captured Israelis but of the high American official (former special assistant for intelligence to the secretary of defense) who was posted unnecessarily in harm's way. They knew that their American apologists, led by former hostages Jeremy Levin and Benjamin Weir, would troop before the TV cameras to apologize and divert. They knew that the U.S. administration would hand them a victory by declaring this now really quite routine crime a "crisis." They also knew that American retaliation would be palsied by all kinds of constraints, ethical and political. Some of these limit Israel, too. But only some. Proximity makes for less queasiness.

Suddenly there were some constraints on television as well. ABC News declined to show the macabre videotape of the purported hanging on ABC News. Peter Jennings indicated that this was out of delicate concern for the sensibilities of his viewers. Could it be, however, that he couldn't bear to show his audience the vivid barbarism practiced by people he's wanted us to believe were not unlike our neighbors down the street?

If more of the hostages are murdered, we can expect torrents of abuse on Israel. For the record, and because our media suffer from amnesia, it's important to remember that Americans never went to Lebanon at the behest of Israel or in the defense of Israel. The American presence, such as it was (and is), aimed always at the protection of the Palestinians and of the PLO. No good deed goes unpunished.

NOTEBOOK

REVERSE DISCRIMINATION AT THE TOP: A familiar, and not unjustified, conservative complaint about affirmative action is that it often leads to the hiring and promotion of unqualified people because of their skin color. As it happens, the outstanding example of this phenomenon in the country at the moment is William Lucas, President Bush's failed nominee to be assistant attorney general for civil rights. Lucas has virtually no experience practicing law of any sort, let alone civil rights law. He also has had minor troubles with résumé padding, lying on a bar application, and sneaking jewelry past customs. Lucas was chosen for one principal reason: his race. Can anyone seriously assert that he would have been Bush's nominee for the civil rights post if he were white? For our money, there is nothing especially wrong with preferring a black to a white for the nation's top civil rights law enforcement job. But this example shows that "color-blindness" is a more problematic ideal than most affirmative action opponents acknowledge. And it shows the hypocrisy, or mere dunderheadedness, of Lucas's supporters—including Lucas himself—with their headachy harangues about the evils of reverse discrimination.

THIRD THOUGHTS: Robert Bork couldn't resist telling Congress last month that if he were on the Supreme Court, *Texas* v. *Johnson*, the 5-4 ruling that flag burning is protected by the Constitution (with Justice Anthony Kennedy, who got Bork's seat, in the majority), would have gone the other way. This casts an interesting retrospective light on the controversy two years ago over Bork's so-called "confirmation conversion" on First Amendment issues. Bork had written that the First Amendment protected only explicitly political speech,

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and within that category only speech that didn't advocate illegality. At his confirmation hearings he said he had put those ancient, stinting views behind him. He wasn't asked specifically about symbolic speech, such as flag burning, but he leaned over backward to suggest he was now dedicated to an expansive reading of the First Amendment. Skeptics about Bork's convenient change of heart were branded as overly cynical. Perhaps not.

QUAYLE GROWTH WATCH: "Friends and foes say that after six months in office, the cherry-cheeked former senator from Indiana is learning and growing. . . . However, even his key advisers concede that Quayle is not yet ready to be president." —"The slow education of Dan Quayle" by John W. Mashek, *Boston Globe*, July 17
(thanks to David Rosenson, Brookline, Massachusetts)

WANNA BET? President Bush's decision to phase out the Voluntary [sic] Restraint Agreements—i.e., import quotas—in the steel industry over two-and-a-half years is being greeted with tactful praise by free trade supporters and by the steel-using companies (auto firms, for example) that have been hurt in international competition by having to pay higher prices for their main input. Steel quotas were introduced by President Reagan in 1984, and, like most such protectionist measures, were supposed to be temporary—just to let the industry get back on its feet. Bush could have let them expire next month, but promised not to while campaigning in Pennsylvania last year. The phaseout is supposed to be a compromise between Bush's promise and his principles. But the politics of protectionism are vicious, and Bush is not known for his passionate adherence to principles. Will he really allow the quotas to lapse in March 1992—the beginning of an election year? We are willing to bet a sample of our product, a lifetime TNR subscription, against a sample of a steel-using product—say, a Cadillac—that steel quotas will still be with us come Election Day 1992. Any takers?

STOCK REPORT: Robert S. McIntyre's article on page 18 dispenses with just about every argument for reopening the special tax loophole for capital gains—except one: that high capital gains taxes put America at a disadvantage compared with our economic rivals. According to a chart put out by the capital gains lobby (it's in the August 7 *U.S. News & World Report*), Japan taxes capital gains on stock sales at only five percent, compared with 33 percent in America. In fact, America's rate (absurdly) drops to 28 percent at very high incomes. More important, Japan's five percent is a tax on the *gross proceeds* of a stock sale. If you prefer, you can pay a 20 percent tax on your gain alone. Moreover, capital gains on the sale of small businesses and real estate are fully taxed at rates up to 50 percent. And Japan has a very stiff inheritance tax, with far smaller exemptions than America's and rates up to 75 percent. Few American capitalists would trade places.

NEW MAN: Adam Michnik joins our list of contributing editors this week. Michnik, a historian and a political philosopher, is an adviser to Lech Walesa and the first editor in chief of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, the new, independent Polish daily newspaper. Michnik served 18 months in prison for his protests against censorship. He will report for TNR from time to time on the extraordinary developments in Eastern Europe.

YES, NO, MAYBE:

Senate Backs Funding of Stealth Bomber, 98-1
—*Los Angeles Times*, July 26

SENATE DEALS BUSH DEFEAT IN KILLING FUNDS FOR STEALTH
—*New York Times*, same day

Senate Gives Conditional Go-Ahead on B-2 Bomber
—*Washington Post*, same day
(thanks to many readers)

PLO-POURRI:

Senate rejects limits on PLO talks
—*New York Post*, July 21

Senators Back Cut in Contacts With the P.L.O.
—*New York Times*, same day

Senate votes to restrict U.S.-PLO contacts
—*Denver Post*, same day

Senate rejects restrictions on PLO talks
—(Denver) *Rocky Mountain News*, same day
(thanks to many readers)

WASHINGTON SCENE

Mapplethorpe of My Eye

By Alex Heard

"I cannot bring myself to describe these [Robert Mapplethorpe] pictures in all their gruesome particularities, and it is doubtful that this newspaper would agree to publish such a description even if I could bring myself to write one." —Hilton Kramer, "Is Art Above the Laws of Decency?" *New York Times*, July 2

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There's been a lot of that kind of talk lately. And on July 20, when the doors opened here on the exhibit that has all America shouting, I felt the same queasy dread I used to feel when I climbed the tall bookshelves to get at my father's off-limits medical textbooks: I kept expecting to find a grainy 10' by 10' straight out of *Diseases of the Perverse*. But it wasn't that bad. In fact, to anyone who hasn't been completely shielded from run-of-the-mill societal grossness the past ten years, it wasn't bad at all.

"But was it," everyone wants to know, "art?" I'm not qualified to say. My notes reveal a stark inability to "see" past surface imagery. "James Ford 1979. Bored naked guy in a tub." "Ken and Tyler: *Two* naked guys together, *zero* visible 'things.' " What I set out to do was judge (for both potential viewers and boondocks-dwellers who won't get to see the show but do want to argue about it) whether the cries of foul have been warranted. My opinion: go, but don't take your grandma to it, unless she's in her Ruth Gordonish "unshockable older person" phase. Even then, take separate sweeps through the room with the Forbidden Pix.

You probably know all about the arts controversy that has swept Washington, but to review: Congress first got mad at the National Endowment for the Arts a few months ago, when it learned that some of its money went to a North Carolina arts center that awarded $15,000 to Andres Serrano, who shot a photo of a crucifix in a jar of urine. NEA funds ($30,000) also went to the Philadelphia Institute of Contemporary Art, which organized the Mapplethorpe retrospective. The Corcoran Gallery was slated to house the exhibit but chickened out in June, after Senator Jesse Helms and others criticized the museum for its decision to showcase what Texas Representative Dick Armey (an old anti-NEA hand) called "artists whose forte is ridiculing the values . . . of Americans who are paying for it." A local group, the Washington Project for the Arts, decided to host the show soon after. On July 26, a week after this opening, Helms caused the loudest noise when he pushed through an appropriations bill amendment that would prohibit the NEA from funding art that is, along with other vague adjectives, "indecent."

The WPA used the occasion of the opening to hold an AIDS benefit, and at $250 a pop (a donation/entry fee required of everybody except people with "ins," media with real clout, and assorted wheedlers like TNR) the result was an upscale crowd made up mostly of liberal politicians, academics, local art connoisseurs, and assorted urban hipsters. This was *notnotnot* a cross section of typical Americana. There weren't even any soldiers from Washington's large subculture of right-wing guerrillas, those fervent people who sneak into events like this and whip out stashed signs that read, "Young Ams for Values Demand: Into the Toilet with 'Piss Art'!" I think the pricey ducats scared them off.

The exhibit is set up about as tastefully as it could be. The bulk of it is tame stuff indeed: shots of muscular black men, *sans* genital exposure, sitting on pedestals; come-hither Mapplethorpe self-portraits; many flowers; cornball mixed-media stuff from early in his career (note to angry right-wingers: one piece blasphemously turns an image of the Virgin into a tie rack!), the so-called "erotic" shots of boys (in fact, the lads are just sitting around in the nude—the photos are the same type your mom hauls out for embarrassing-you purposes); and way too many shots of that angst-ridden old bore, Patti Smith.

The Forbidden Pix are set off in one small room in a back corner of the exhibit's second floor. The warning sign at the door might benefit from *slightly* stronger wording. (It says in part, "The Robert Mapplethorpe exhibit contains material that may be considered inappropriate for some children.") But my real quibble is with the room's setup. Entering, you see a wall of large, friendly flower prints—these lure you to an enclosed case that contains three long rows of 1' by 1' prints of . . . the Forbidden Pix. It's the same type of case, only smaller and simpler, used to display documents at the National Archives: you must file past the Pix shoulder to shoulder with strangers. This is OK when you and the person next to you are sharing a glimpse of the Constitution; it's a bit embarrassing when you make accidental, brows-raised eye contact after seeing a penis the size of Popeye's forearm. And yes, I know. This viewing mode forces us to confront our voyeurism . . . but I already knew I was a voyeur. Why else would I be there?

Sorry for the outburst. And sorry, Hilton Kramer, but I *can* bring myself to describe the Forbidden Pix. The middle row is all flowers—the idea being, I think, to provide a visual "breather" between the gnarlier top and bottom rows. Many of these are tame, too. In one shot, we get mooned. In another, a guy has his head wrapped in what looks like a jock. And in another, a man in a polyester suit has, as we used to say, unleashed his trouser trout. The photos with high squirm factors depict various homosexual high jinks—fisting, a finger catheter, Mapplethorpe with a bullwhip handle stuck up his butt, and a quite awful one involving painful genital hardware. We also see much S&M leather. Gross? You betcha. But mostly boring. Everybody I shared line-time with (to be thorough, I shuffled through a dozen viewings) used the technique all people use in all art museums: they put on a grim stoneface that denotes "thoughtfulness," and nodded frequently.

Outside the room I conducted an exit poll. The results, as you might expect, were uniform. Censorship is very bad and art is good—though we may agree to disagree on what constitutes it (art, that is). "Art is beauty," one viewer explained, "and that's good, and each of us has his or her own idea of what's beautiful, and *that* is wonderful, and though what's in there may not be for me, I would not suppress it." Some of this hip tolerance—*nobody* I spoke to would admit any of the Pix were gross—grated on my nerves. ("THAT," sneered one guy, referring to a shot of a huge erection, "is I suppose the sort of thing 'America' objects to?" Another man, a dapper European-looking gent, said, "Offensive? I will tell you what is offensive! Some of the unorganized splashes of pigment I see in the National

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Gallery's East Wing!") But such talk wasn't enough to bounce me into Armey's Army: deep down, I agreed with the basic principles underlying the argle-bargle.

Armey points out that many of his constituents aren't artsy sophisticates, but "wage-earners who must work 275 days just to *gross* the $15,000 Serrano pocketed for urinating in a jar." I see his point, but I still can't buy the idea of cutting an agency's budget by ten percent because two exhibits out of thousands offend his people. Armey should concentrate on proving his contention that government arts funding works like a defense procurement scandal: that is, that pals on one side of the revolving door tend to dish out money to pals on the other. If he can do that, he earns my budget-slashing vote. If not, he should be quiet.

In the meantime, I think ordinary people will survive shock art. A few days after the gala I went back to the exhibit and saw, along with the usual urbanites, some actual shorts-wearing tourists from the Mall. Emerging from the randy room, they wore the same blank faces as the art fans. They may have been stunned into silence. But I prefer to believe that one comment I heard was representative. A woman wearing the official state hairdo of Kansas—a tangled perm called "The Sloppy Joe"—looked at her husband and said, "Well. *That* was sure stupid."

ALEX HEARD is a Washington writer.

Welfare for H. Ross Perot.

Airport '89

By Elaine Buckberg

Texas computer billionaire H. Ross Perot and his son Ross Jr. are building the world's first industrial airport, due to open in December. The Alliance Airport and International Centre, north of Fort Worth, will handle no passengers—only cargo. Planes can taxi directly from the runway into the Perots' 4,200-acre industrial park. The Perots donated 414 acres and $14 million to construct the $250 million airport complex, to be owned by the city of Fort Worth. Although most of the funding comes from local governments, the Federal Aviation Administration is footing the bill for the runway, taxiways, lighting, and navigational aid—to the tune of $34 million, not including the cost of air traffic control operations.

It sounds like a great idea. With air freight getting cheaper, the airport will become the focus of a large industrial center—like the seaports of earlier centuries. The Perots, who own a total of over 21,000 acres around the site, will make a killing as the land becomes valuable. But if the project is going to be so profitable, why is it necessary for the federal taxpayers to give the Perots $34 million?

According to the FAA, Alliance qualifies for government subsidy as a "reliever" airport—that is, relieving overcrowding at the nearby Dallas-Fort Worth airport. Actually, the Perots hope to open a whole new market for air freight, not to draw business away from D/FW. Of the three tenants already committed to the industrial park, none currently operates out of D/FW.

The Alliance subsidy comes from the Airport and Airway Trust Fund, which is financed primarily by the airline passenger ticket tax. The idea is that airport improvements (and the air traffic control system) are financed by the people who use them—just as the highway trust fund is financed by a gasoline tax. The whole idea of the Perots' airport is that it will carry no passengers, which makes the use of airline ticket tax money odd, to say the least.

Even odder, though, is the size of the grant. The $34 million sum, allocated over three years, is unprecedented. Congress decides how much the FAA can spend from the trust fund each year, and lays down general guidelines for where it should go. For fiscal 1989 it appropriated $1.5 billion for airport construction, $1.4 billion of which was earmarked for the largest passenger airports. It set a cap of $16 million for any one airport from this $1.4 billion. Of the remaining $100 million "discretionary fund," ten percent ($10 million) was supposed to go to reliever airports.

So the Perots' project is getting more than double the annual appropriation for the largest passenger airports, and almost three-and-a-half years' worth of reliever airport funds. An airport like O'Hare in Chicago generates far more ticket-tax revenue than it gets back in payments from the trust fund. O'Hare recently completed a $2 billion expansion without any funds from the FAA. It did this by floating bonds—borrowing the money—which it will pay back with revenues from airlines, concessions, etc. (ultimately paid for by passengers). The Perots' airport, by contrast, will start life 100 percent debt-free.

Perot received $2 billion when he sold Electronic Data Systems to General Motors in 1984 and another $750 million from GM two years later to go away and leave them alone. According to the *New York Times*, local landowners estimate that the Perots paid $50 million in 1986 for the 4,200 acres that constitute the industrial park, or about 27 cents a square foot. Although the *Times* reported that the Perots are now selling that land for two dollars a square foot, Mike Berry, who is running the Alliance project for the Perot Group, told me, "That is a little low, quite frankly." Even at two dollars, though, the Perots' profit on the industrial park land alone would be $300 million. That doesn't include the adjacent land they own, or future price rises when the project actually gets going.

So the taxpayers' $34 million is really just pocket change. Still, it's not a bad gratuity. It puts to shame the

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amounts making headlines every day in the HUD scandal—also involving people using their influence to rip off the government, and also perfectly legal. How did the Perots swing it? Apparently the influence of former House Speaker Jim Wright played a role. (Fort Worth was his district.) So did the legend of H. Ross Perot, the rip-roaring, self-made capitalist. But few such buccaneers make do without any help at all from the feds. The Perots' airport is a pet project of the FAA's regional office, which actually approached them with the idea originally. Despite the old Reaganite saw, when someone says, "I'm from the government and I'm here to help you," he's probably telling the truth—at least if you're already rich.

WHITE HOUSE WATCH

Now for the Hard Part

By Fred Barnes

The real White House hard-liner on capital gains is President Bush. In July budget director Richard Darman and Treasury Secretary Nicholas Brady came to him with a compromise. The president had proposed cutting the tax rate on capital gains from 28 percent to 15 percent. Now, they said, to get a bill through the House Ways and Means Committee he'd have to settle for dropping the rate to 20 percent. That cut would last for two years. Then the rate would bounce back to 28 percent. He wasn't persuaded by the fact that a majority on the committee, including six Democrats, has agreed to this idea. So they offered their clincher. Once we get the capital gains rate down to 20 percent, we'll keep it there, somehow. He bought on.

But enactment of a capital gains cut did not follow. In his first half-year as president, when Bush made a deal with Congress—on the budget, *contras*—victory was assured. Not anymore. On capital gains, the only thing Bush has assured himself of is victory in the Ways and Means Committee. He still has the full House, the Senate Finance Committee, the Senate, and a House-Senate conference to contend with.

No one in the White House is confident the bill can win on the House floor. For it to pass, Bush would have to wage ideological war with the new Democratic leaders, Speaker Tom Foley and Majority Leader Richard Gephardt. They've implied the fight would be a bloodbath. Even if Bush won, there'd be a high cost. He would jeopardize the good relations he's nurtured with congressional Democrats. He might doom a new bipartisan budget agreement for 1991 and beyond.

Two things have changed in Bush's dealings with Congress. One is the issues. He scored on issues that don't particularly energize Democrats: Third World debt, the savings and loan bailout, the budget resolution. On aid to the *contras*, Bush gave so much ground that Democrats made a token concession of nonmilitary, subsistence aid. Now the agenda is cluttered with divisive issues: Pentagon weapons systems, civil rights enforcement, capital gains. Bush's specialties as a politician—sounding reasonable, making a modest compromise—don't work on these.

On defense, Bush's compromise looked stable, and Representative Les Aspin, the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, endorsed it. Bush would fund the Midgetman missile, the favorite of Democrats, along with the mobile MX. He'd cut back on what Reagan had asked for the Strategic Defense Initiative. He'd fund the costly Stealth (B-2) bomber, but scrap further production of the F-14 fighter and the V-22 transport plane. This deal unraveled on the House floor.

Bush was part of the problem. A drastic cut in production of the B-2, whose image is that of a money-guzzling plane that may not fly, was inevitable. But the big bite out of SDI funding wasn't. Star Wars requires aggressive marketing. Defense Secretary Richard Cheney has done some, but Bush hasn't. "SDI is there to be sold as a pork program," says a White House official. "Pieces of it are produced in nearly every congressional district." Bush's response to the House simply was that he'd cut Star Wars enough. Reagan asked $5.9 billion for Star Wars in 1990. Bush trimmed it to $4.6 billion, and the House slashed that to $3.1 billion. "I will point out to the American people that SDI has already been cut . . . ," Bush said at his press conference on July 28. "[W]e don't need further cuts. . . ."

William Lucas, nominated as head of the civil rights division in the Justice Department, was also a victim of Bush's refusal to fight vigorously. A few days before the Senate Judiciary Committee voted Lucas down, Bush invited him to a private meal upstairs at the White House. At his press conference, Bush said he'd had Lucas "over at the house for dinner here." He said he'd made phone calls for Lucas, but he didn't lean on anyone or offer anything. This is inadequate when a nominee faces strong opposition, as Lucas did from the civil rights lobby. Bush should have learned that from the defeat of John Tower as defense secretary.

The other change is Gephardt. At the White House, Foley is revered as a conciliator, and Bill Gray, the House Democratic whip, is not regarded as a serious player, yet. The Bush crowd thinks Gephardt has brought a partisan edge to everything House Democrats do, and complain that he's reviving the spirit of the 1988 presidential election. Worse, he's affecting Foley. Instead of what an aide calls "the real Tom Foley," the White House is confronted with "the Gephardt Tom Foley," who is more partisan and combative.

With Gephardt in the leadership, everything becomes harder for Bush. (I'm assuming Gephardt has

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found his niche as a liberal with strong ties to labor and a taste for populist demagoguery.) On the 20th anniversary of the moon landing, Bush unveiled plans to send a new mission to the moon and on to Mars, without saying where he'd get the money. Gephardt derided Bush for trying to have a "free launch."

Bush will have to sell his space program aggressively or it'll be a non-starter, and he will have to justify the extra $2 billion for it that he's certain to stick in the 1991 budget. No one at the White House seems to know whether he's prepared for an all-out effort to revive the nation's interest in space, no easy task.

My guess is that Bush will uncork new initiatives on education and welfare. The memorandum on "Six Months of the Bush Administration," churned out by the White House Office of Cabinet Affairs, boasts that Bush has "proposed and sent to Congress a comprehensive education package." White House aides figure Bush was lucky to get away with proposing so little. Democrats will look askance at any new Bush education plan, unless he wants to spend billions more, which he won't. On welfare, Bush is obligated to let Jack Kemp, the secretary of housing and urban development, put together a conservative anti-poverty program. Democrats won't like that either.

Bush can live without achieving any of these new programs. They'd give his presidency some definition, but that's risky. The same is true about a cut in the capital gains rate. Bush wants to make a deal with Democratic leaders, not renegade Democrats on the Ways and Means Committee. That way, he'd know the capital gains cut would pass.

But Foley and Gephardt are only offering an indexing of capital gains. Unless they suddenly agree to a rate reduction, Bush has a tough call. He can wage a full campaign for a bill he finds acceptable but isn't crazy about. Or he can husband his bipartisan friendships on Capitol Hill, settle for nothing or what Democrats allow him, and hope for benefits later, maybe Darman's goal of a "substantial multiyear deficit reduction package." Is Bush a fighter or a dreamer? Soon we'll know.

Real-life scenes from the class struggle.

Beverly Hills HUD

By Timothy Noah

Recently the scandal-ridden Department of Housing and Urban Development made public the files of Deborah Gore Dean, the ambitious executive assistant to former Secretary Samuel Pierce. The contents are as absorbing and tangled as the subplots in a Victorian novel, each strand telling the timeless story of government failure to provide decent housing for the poor. Many of these narratives may yet end with criminal indictments for outright fraud, but the most interesting simply detail routine betrayal of common sense in the allocation of diminishing housing dollars. Among these is the story of how the federal government decided to spend $10 million to $20 million to build a housing project for the citizens of Beverly Hills, California.

Testifying last month on Capitol Hill, U.S. Trade Representative Carla Hills mentioned in passing that as a Washington lawyer (and former HUD secretary), she'd been hired to lobby Pierce on behalf of the Beverly Hills project. When the hearing room erupted in laughter, Hills said, "I know that people smile when you say Beverly Hills, but poor people can live in affluent neighborhoods."

Perhaps alone among the HUD projects that have lately found their way into the newspapers, the Beverly Hills venture is one that most participants seem proud of. As Hills elaborated on HUD housing in the ritzy suburb, Representative Christopher Shays interrupted to say, "You may be telling us more than we want to know." The committee wanted to hear about Hills's efforts on behalf of the Washington-based DRG Funding Corp., whose default on HUD loans may cost the government upward of $300 million. Obviously eager to dodge questions about DRG, Hills rattled on about the Beverly Hills project instead. "You really should know this," Hills insisted, because it made "such a good case for the policy." But if the federally subsidized housing in Beverly Hills really is a success story, it's time to start worrying whether federal housing policy is an even bigger shambles than HUD's highly publicized failures suggest.

Beverly Hills (pop. 35,000) is a rich city with a few non-rich inhabitants. Some of them are single parents who want their children to attend Beverly Hills schools. But most of them are elderly. The 1980 census revealed that the city harbored about 1,400 citizens aged 62 and older with household incomes of less than $10,000. About 80 percent of these were renters. The inflation of the late 1970s was especially hard on this group.

In 1979 the city decided to build subsidized housing for the elderly on the edge of the "Golden Triangle," a pricey shopping district that "commands some of the highest rents and land costs in the nation," as Mayor Benjamin H. Stansbury Jr. pointed out in a letter to HUD. Rodeo Drive is three blocks west. The site had previously been used as a city parking lot. The city decided to build an underground garage for the neighborhood and a ground-level row of shops. Three floors of HUD-financed housing units would go on top. These air rights, which constituted Beverly Hills' primary contribution to the housing project, are currently estimated to be worth as much as $15 million. That's $100,000 for each of the 150 housing units ultimately built. The city

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might have been better off selling the land to a developer and using the proceeds to create a municipal rent subsidy program of its own.

Instead, it decided to seek federal money from HUD's Section 202 program, which makes long-term, low-interest loans to build housing for the elderly poor. The Beverly Hills project ended up with a $9 million, 20-year HUD loan at an interest rate that, for complicated reasons, came to about the same as the market rate. But Section 202 projects get hefty rent subsidies for the tenants; the Los Angeles HUD office says the cost to the federal government last year was $878,000 for the Beverly Hills project. Eligibility is restricted by a fairly severe means test: $13,950 for one person and $15,950 for a couple. Tenants must pay 30 percent of their income in rent; HUD makes up the difference.

By law, Section 202 projects must be run by nonprofit organizations. Beverly Hills settled on the Menorah Housing Foundation, a Jewish volunteer organization that had already built subsidized housing for the elderly elsewhere around Los Angeles. In 1982 the foundation secured HUD funding for the Beverly Hills project and began to build.

Getting HUD money is not easy. Each year far more projects apply for funds than get them. The applicants are ranked according to a variety of criteria ranging from experience of the sponsor to desirability of the site. During the last two decades, the federal government has tried to disperse subsidized housing outside of low-income areas, thereby avoiding disastrous inner-city projects like Pruitt-Igoe, the 43-building complex that the city of St. Louis blew up in 1972, creating a lasting symbol of failure in urban policy. As a result, a city like Beverly Hills has an easier time winning Section 202 money than a city like Detroit. This makes sense if you can get a Beverly Hills to open its doors to the community at large. It makes less sense if the federal government ends up paying to house a small group of low-income citizens from a wealthy suburb that can afford to take care of its own.

Beverly Hills intended all along to reserve 90 percent of the HUD apartment units for its own citizens. Stansbury, who was mayor in 1982, says HUD approved this up front. A spokesman for HUD's regional office in San Francisco says they've never granted residency preferences. Maxwell Kaufer, president of the Menorah Foundation, doesn't recall that the issue ever came up in the application process.

The issue did come up in the spring of 1987, when construction on the stucco and brick structure was completed. HUD informed Menorah that it would have to let in applicants from the entire area, not just Beverly Hills. City officials sent a flurry of complaining letters to Washington. Irwin Moss Kaplan, the city director of planning, pointed out that in addition to donating the air rights, Beverly Hills had contributed nearly $2 million to provide amenities disallowed by Section 202's regulations. "No jacuzzis, atriums," reads an outline presented by Thomas Safran, a Menorah board member, to the Beverly Hills City Council in 1982. The city didn't add jacuzzis and atriums, but it did provide balconies, brick veneering, special paving for terrace areas, some extra elevators, and assorted other improvements. The city had also kicked in another $1 million from a federal community development block grant to pay for assorted start-up costs.

Meanwhile, Menorah had accepted applications to move in. This provided a second surprise: although census figures showed at least 1,400 Beverly Hills residents were eligible, only 226 applied. That was more than enough to fill the 150-unit building. But it suggested that Beverly Hills did not rank high among American cities in desperate need of public housing. According to *Newsweek*, the federal government meets less than half the nationwide demand for low-income housing; 35,000 people are vying for 18,000 housing units in Baltimore alone. In Beverly Hills, everyone involved in the HUD project has a different explanation for why so few residents applied. The others were "too shy, too reclusive, or too proud" (Stansbury). They "didn't know when the filing date was" (Annabelle Heiferman, president of the Beverly Hills Senior Adult Association and later Beverly Hills mayor). They figured "they didn't have a chance in hell of getting in" (Donna Ellman, yet another former mayor). One more possibility, based on my own observation growing up in Beverly Hills: though impoverished on paper, a lot of these elderly citizens have wealthy children who routinely help out with rent and other expenses.

Compared with the 226 who applied from inside Beverly Hills, more than 2,600 applied from surrounding areas, much to the chagrin of city officials. When I asked Stansbury whether these figures suggested a far greater need for public housing outside Beverly Hills, he snapped, "There's more people in India that are starving, too. What am I supposed to do? Put them in Beverly Hills?" Among the total pool were a much higher proportion of minorities. For example, the Beverly Hills pool was less than two percent black; the total pool was more than seven percent. Similarly, Asians were about four percent of the Beverly Hills pool, but nearly 14 percent of the total. Judith Brachman, HUD assistant secretary for fair housing in Washington, concluded from these figures that granting a residency preference would violate HUD's "affirmative marketing" guidelines; Lawrence Goldberger, director of elderly assisted housing, disagreed. Menorah paid Carla Hills $12,000 to lobby the final arbiter, Pierce, though a face-to-face meeting proved unnecessary.

A document written in Deborah Gore's nicely rounded hand tells the rest of the story. Although Beverly Hills had only dared to request a 50 percent preference in light of rebuffs from HUD's California offices, Dean wrote that Pierce had decided to allow a 70 percent preference to provide "an incentive to local

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citizens to become involved in the Section 202 program." She wrote that Pierce had concluded "affirmative marketing" would not be adversely affected. As Carla Hills later explained to the *Los Angeles Times*, Beverly Hills officials "are perfectly willing to have minorities in the housing units. They just want them to be Beverly Hills minorities." So listen up, Scarsdale and Grosse Pointe: you too can build federally subsidized housing without worrying about ruining the neighborhood.

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The old folks outfox themselves.

Catastrophic Follies

By Phillip Longman

What's wrong with this picture? One day this summer, busloads of outraged old people—most of them from Sarasota and other affluent Florida retirement communities—pulled up at the state headquarters of the American Association of Retired Persons in dowdy St. Petersburg and proceeded to picket the building with signs reading "Down with the AARP." They had come to denounce the nation's largest senior citizen group (28 million members) for one reason alone: its role in securing the first major expansion of health care benefits for the elderly in a generation.

The Medicare Catastrophic Coverage Act—also the first major social welfare legislation of any sort in more than a decade—passed the House and Senate by overwhelming margins in June 1988 and was signed with a flourish by President Reagan. Now there's talk of even repealing it. What went wrong?

The story begins when Otis Bowen arrived in Washington in late 1985 as Reagan's new secretary of health and human services. When he took charge at HHS, Bowen was still grieving for his wife, who had spent three months in a hospital fighting a losing battle with bone cancer. That experience, he told his staff, had taught him what a raw deal Medicare was when you really needed it.

Medicare, at the time, covered all sorts of routine medical expenses, such as doctor visits and X-rays, but would pay for only the first 60 days of an elderly patient's hospital stay. The affluent elderly could, and usually did, solve this problem with so-called "Medigap" insurance policies from private insurers. But the industry was rife with fraud and spent enormous sums on marketing devices such as hiring Lorne Greene and Art Linkletter. And adequate Medigap policies were beyond the reach of the elderly poor. Even to a conservative Indiana Republican, the private sector seemed to be failing where government could succeed.

Since only a few of the elderly (approximately 0.3 percent) actually require more than 60 continuous days of hospital care per year, Bowen reasoned that government could cheaply insure against this risk on an actuarially sound basis. As long as the program was mandatory, government would avoid the problem of adverse selection, which is the tendency of people to buy insurance only when they think they are likely to collect a benefit.

Sensing a political opportunity—and no doubt also moved by the story of Mrs. Bowen—Reagan ignored the objections of White House conservatives and endorsed Bowen's plan. The bill the administration sent to Congress would have covered all hospital and physician costs for Medicare participants over $2,000 a year. It would be financed by adding an extra $4.92 a month to the $17.90 that Medicare participants already were paying for physician services.

The Gray Lobby had misgivings from the beginning. They were appalled by the White House's insistence that the elderly finance the new program themselves. Some also feared that "catastrophic" hospital coverage would pre-empt a new benefit more sorely coveted by the elderly, long-term nursing-home care. As the nation's third-largest originator of Medigap insurance, the AARP had strong commercial reasons to oppose the Bowen plan. Most of its predominantly middle-class members already had catastrophic coverage, from AARP or somebody else. But the AARP decided in the end that it couldn't very well oppose a major new benefit for the elderly.

When Reagan formally sent his plan to Congress in February 1987, a bidding war started, involving members in both parties. The late Claude Pepper set the tone by offering an amendment to provide free home care for the disabled elderly, such as a live-in cook or maid. The astronomical cost of the Pepper proposal, and the passion it inspired among some elderly voters, had the effect of upping the ante. Compared with Pepper's, virtually any other "improvement" on the Bowen plan looked fiscally responsible. And every member of Congress who opposed Pepper still felt in desperate need of something else to do for the elderly.

By the time it was all over, the bill offered not only free hospital and physician care after $2,000 a year but also, beginning in 1991: 80 percent of the cost of prescription drugs after a $600 deductible; up to 150 days of free skilled nursing-home care; and 38 days plus 80 hours a year of free home health care. The bill also changes the Medicaid (health care for the poor) rules to allow people to qualify for free nursing-home care without using up all the financial resources of a spouse. The prescription-drug benefit alone will easily cost $6.8 million a year, and probably a lot more.

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To pay for all this, Congress kept the proposed Medicare premium increase at four dollars a month but added a special 15 percent income tax surtax on Medicare participants who earn enough money to owe at least $150 a year in federal income taxes. That is only about 44 percent of elderly households. The tax is capped at $800 a year per person, a threshold that is reached at an income of about $50,000 a year.

The surtax was the problem. Because it reflected a cross-subsidy of the elderly poor by the elderly affluent, many would have to pay more for the new benefit than they were paying for the Medigap insurance it replaced. But the rage of the elderly was mostly not that specific. It was against the very idea that they should be expected to pay themselves for any new government benefit they might obtain.

Congressional Democrats campaigning in their districts as early as the 1987 Christmas recess were appalled to find that even among the majority of elderly voters who would be exempt from the surtax, support for the program was far from universal. Many of the elderly had assumed that all the talk about catastrophic health care meant that Congress was getting ready to pass an entitlement to long-term nursing-home care, and were bitterly disappointed when they found out otherwise.

Playing an especially nefarious role in all this was the Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare, a direct-mail mill fronted by FDR's son James Roosevelt, which members of Congress loathe and fear for its record of stirring up resentment among the elderly with misleading direct-mail solicitations. This organization—a sort of doppelgänger of the AARP itself—picked the catastrophic bill as its next target of opportunity and was not careful to emphasize in its mailings how few people would have to pay the extra $800. Also exploiting the possibilities for discontent were the Gray Panthers and the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Associations, which opposed the prescription-drug provision out of the reasonable fear that if the government were paying for all these drugs it might want to have some say over how much they cost.

Congress and the AARP have been besieged. The abuse heaped on the AARP by its members this summer has been so unrelenting that its Washington policy staff—most of them idealistic, liberal-minded baby boomers—have begun to talk back like unrepentant granny-bashers. Some congressional offices have been receiving up to 1,000 letters a week from mostly middle- and upper-income retirees demanding that the bill should be repealed or its cost should be shifted onto someone else.

With the elderly lobby suddenly divided against itself, Congress actually has some room to maneuver on the catastrophic bill—or at least more room than usual when it comes to aging issues. Is this a program the nation needs and, if so, who should pay for it?

As a starting point, Congress might keep in mind that Medicare as a whole is going broke. Medicare is actually two programs, known as "Part A" and "Part B." Part A pays for hospital expenses and is financed by a 2.9 percent payroll tax on workers and employers. Even though the revenue base for this program is today swollen by the enormous baby boom generation, the government barely has enough money on hand to meet current expenses, which last year came to $52 billion—let alone cover the cost of benefits promised to the future elderly. Despite dramatic cost containment measures enacted over the last six years, Medicare Part A is now one mild recession away from instant insolvency, according to projections by the Health Care Financing Administration. And in any event, according to these same projections, medical inflation and population aging guarantee that the program cannot remain solvent for more than a few years past the turn of the century unless benefits are cut or taxes raised.

Medicare Part B pays for physician services. When Medicare was enacted in 1965, Congress expected the elderly to pay for half the cost of their Part B benefits through special flat-rate premiums. But over the years, Congress has not raised premiums as fast as costs have soared. Last year the program cost $24 billion, three-quarters of which came from general revenues—or, more precisely, from income taxes and federal borrowing. The government doesn't even bother to estimate the long-term solvency of Part B, but all experts agree that it cannot survive without either substantial new revenue or a serious cost reduction.

So it is an odd time for Congress to be preoccupied with expanding Medicare benefits, especially for the well-to-do. Even if Medicare didn't threaten to strand the elderly of the next century, a more appropriate priority might be rescuing the 37 million Americans—most of them children and the working poor—who now lack any health insurance.

Do the affluent elderly have a case in claiming they're being robbed by the catastrophic program? Viewed in isolation, the catastrophic bill is indeed a bad deal for the affluent elderly, but that hardly gives them cause to gripe. Look at what else they're getting.

Start with Social Security. A typical recipient these days receives from two-and-a-half to five times the value of his or her contributions to the system, even after adjusting for imputed interest. The highest benefits go to those least in need, and are primarily financed by a regressive payroll tax that pushes tens of thousands of younger workers and their families below the poverty line. For today's middle-class workers, meanwhile, the rate of return promised under current law is roughly one dollar back in benefits for every dollar contributed in taxes—and even this may not prove sustainable.

The windfalls provided by Medicare are even greater. All told, the elderly themselves pay a mere seven percent of Medicare's total cost through their Part B premiums. Even after figuring in the elderly's share of the general income tax, Americans over age 65 currently fund no more than about ten percent of the Medicare

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benefits they receive. Indeed, a typical Medicare beneficiary, before he or she dies, will consume benefits worth ten to 12 times the total value of his or her lifetime contribution in Medicare taxes.

Many of the elderly desperately need their benefits, but those who are affluent do not. So long as we continue to provide such enormous subsidies to the affluent elderly, why shouldn't they help pay for the poor of their own generation?

This is not to say that the catastrophic bill is a good idea as it stands. First, it at once gives too much and too little. It gives too much to people who can well afford a higher Medicare deductible, and who don't need help paying for routine medical expenses like prescription drugs. At the same time, it gives too little to people for whom paying $2,000 for health care is a catastrophe. Nor does it address the problem of providing nursing-home and other long-term care for the growing ranks of the very old.

Second, even with the premium and surtax as they now stand, the program is almost certain not to be self-financing, as advertised. There was a lunatic moment a few months ago when members of Congress thought they had found a way out of the hole they've dug for themselves with the discovery that the program was running a *surplus*! Senator Lloyd Bentsen therefore proposed simply cutting the odious surtax and leaving it at that. He was soon disabused. The prescription drug benefit alone, when it starts in 1991, could swallow up the program's entire revenue base. And how likely is it, once the government is there to pay for unlimited hospital stays, that only 0.3 percent of the Medicare population will continue to need this service? Especially when there is no equivalent program to pay for nursing homes—and when hospitals are suffering a severe patient shortage—long hospital stays are sure to proliferate.

Perversely, the House Ways and Means Committee, as it battles the firestorm over the program, seems intent on preserving the current benefit structure, but shifting more of the cost onto low-income old people. The current Ways and Means plan is to cut the surtax but increase the Part B premium. The result would be to double the program's cost to individuals with incomes under $25,000—from $58.80 a year to $100.80. Meanwhile, those with around $40,000 in income would see their required contributions cut from $409.80 a year to $276.30. All high-income brackets would get similar cuts, except for those making over $80,000 a year, who would pay $42 more.

This approach simply makes the program's current inequities worse. The same will be true if Congress allows Medicare beneficiaries to opt out of catastrophic coverage while continuing to collect their other, heavily subsidized, Medicare benefits. The affluent and most middle-class elderly will flee, leaving the poor elderly—and, inevitably, the general taxpayer—to pick up the tab.

The affluent elderly must realize that they may pay a price for their selfishness. The catastrophic fuss has split the elderly lobby and weakened it. Fernando Torres-Gil, former staff director of the House Select Committee on Aging and now a professor of gerontology at the University of Southern California, says: "A lot of us are starting to say, maybe we can't afford to be advocates for the elderly as a whole anymore. . . . I think it will cause a lot of us to reassess putting all our efforts into programs that distribute on the basis of age alone." Good idea.

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A primer on a stupid idea.

Tax Deform

By Robert S. McIntyre

George Bush's campaign promise to undo tax reform seems dangerously close to fulfillment. Six mostly Southern Democrats on the House Ways and Means Committee and, of course, all 13 committee Republicans have joined with the president to support a big cut in the tax on "capital gains"—profits from the sale of assets. The 1986 tax reform act, about which Bush bragged in the last election, eliminated the special break for capital gains. That was a central element of the reform's trade-off of loopholes for lower rates.

Shortly after taking office, Bush proposed a 45 percent exclusion for capital gains, making the effective top

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tax rate 15 percent (compared with 28 percent for ordinary income). At first the idea was considered a non-starter in the Democratic Congress. But then House Ways and Means Chairman Dan Rostenkowski suggested he might be willing to negotiate on the point. Although Rostenkowski later backtracked, this inspired the revolt on his committee, led by Representative Ed Jenkins of Georgia. The Jenkinsites propose a 30 percent capital gains exclusion—lowering the top rate to 19.6 percent—for two years only. After that the tax rate would be returned to normal, but the measure of a capital gain (what you sold for minus what you paid) would be indexed for inflation. This plan enjoys a slim 19-17 majority on the committee, and President Bush graciously says he is willing to compromise with it.

The case against a new special tax break for capital gains is straightforward: (1) it would cost the government many billions of dollars; and (2) almost all the money would go to the richest people in the country, which is unfair. President Bush and the capital gains lobby argue, by contrast, that (1) cutting capital gains taxes would raise, rather than reduce revenue; and (2) most of that money would come from rich people, which is fair enough.

This cui bono debate is important, but so is a point about economic efficiency. As President Reagan's original tax reform proposal put it: "The preferential tax rate for capital gains . . . distorts investment decisions" and "impede[s] the efficiency of an economy based on free market principles." To get the support of Representative Beryl Anthony of Arkansas, for example, Jenkins had to promise that sales of timber would be treated as capital gains in his bill. There is no reason why timber profits are different from any other kinds of profits, or why the government should be interfering with the free market's decision about whether to produce timber or something else. But a special tax rate for capital gains fills the economy with distortions of this sort. To argue that a capital gains break will increase productivity is to argue that the government knows better than private citizens how to invest their money. It is an "undeclared industrial policy," as Reagan's proposal put it. An odd thing, surely, for Bush and friends to be advocating. (Capital gains aficionados: relax! "lock-in" and "indexing" are discussed below.)

According to the congressional Joint Committee on Taxation, four-fifths of all capital gains are reported by the most affluent five percent of the population. Some 60 percent of the benefits of a capital gains tax cut would go to 376,000 people, each making more than $200,000 a year. At current levels of reported gains, they would save an average of more than $30,000 a year each under the Bush plan, and almost $25,000 under the Jenkins version. In contrast, the vast majority of taxpayers have no capital gains at all (other than on their homes, which usually aren't taxed under current law). For the four out of five families earning $50,000 a year or less, the average tax savings under either plan would be less than $20.

The *Wall Street Journal* recently published an editorial and chart purporting to show that these figures are misleading. The *Journal* argues that if you measure income not counting capital gains themselves, the distribution of capital gains is much more equal; in fact, almost half of all capital gains go to people with other income of under $50,000 a year. This is a bit like justifying a tax break for investment bankers on the grounds that if you don't count their income from investment banking, investment bankers don't make much money. The *Journal* offers "a grandmother living off her Social Security check [who] decides to sell the AT&T stock she accumulated over the years for an $80,000 gain" as an example of a "poor" person with a once-in-a-lifetime large capital gain. No doubt it could happen, although why grandma would sell all her stock at once isn't clear. In real life, studies show that capital gains income tends to be more stable, from year to year, than even wages.

(The biggest flaw in the *Journal*'s chart is that its data is from 1985—a pre-tax-reform year when hiding income was so easy that half the wealthiest people in the country paid a smaller share of their earnings in federal taxes than a family of four at the poverty line. Thus, most of the capital gains it shows at supposed low "income" levels merely reflect gains enjoyed by rich people whose incomes were heavily sheltered.)

In recent decades—between reductions in the corporate, estate, capital gains, and top ordinary income tax rates and increases in Social Security and sales taxes—there has been a large shift in the tax burden from capital to labor. The wage earner is bearing more of the cost of government; the coupon-clipper is bearing less. (The federal deficit, the part of that burden that is paid by borrowing rather than by taxes, also benefits capital over labor by raising interest rates.) The 1986 tax reform, although worthy for other reasons, only began to stem this trend. Reintroducing a break for capital gains will make it worse.

That might not matter so much if the break would benefit everyone by making America more prosperous. The Bush administration makes some perfunctory arguments that a capital gains cut would encourage savings and venture capital. Unfortunately, we've been through all this before. Personal savings rates plummeted to historic lows following the last round of capital gains tax cuts in 1978 and 1981. The idea that those previous tax cuts produced a flood of venture capital into risky but socially useful enterprises was refuted by a 1985 Congressional Budget Office report, which found (*a*) that the growth in the venture capital industry was well under way before the 1978 capital gains tax cut took effect (fueled by a rapid surge in demand for high-technology electronic products that began in the mid-'70s) and (*b*) that almost all the increase in venture capital investment after 1978 came from tax-exempt pension funds and other entities unaffected by the tax changes. The share of venture capital supplied by indi-

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vidual investors (for whom the capital gains tax cuts were supposed to be an "incentive") declined markedly. Since the capital gains favoritism was eliminated in 1986, venture capital investment has continued unabated.

In fact, restoring a capital gains loophole would actually hurt the economy, by reinvigorating the tax shelter industry. Tax scams designed to convert ordinary taxable income into capital gains would proliferate, losing the Treasury billions and distorting the economy. The old capital gains break, for example, fed a huge wave of unneeded office construction that produced vacancy rates averaging close to 20 percent in most big cities. As much as a third of the old tax code was devoted to complicated, largely futile attempts by lawmakers to restrict abuses of the capital gains break.

President Bush insists that cutting capital gains taxes will bring in revenue, by stimulating more than twice as many sales of stocks and other assets as would otherwise occur. This is a bit strange on its face, since the Reagan-Bush administration predicted that the elimination of this very loophole in 1986 was a big revenue raiser. According to the administration, Bush's plan would increase federal revenues by close to $5 billion a year over the next few years. Then, after losing about $7 billion a year in the mid-1990s, it would produce a permanent increase in federal revenues of about $2 billion a year, starting at the end of the decade. In contrast, the Joint Committee on Taxation predicts that the Bush plan, after a brief surge in revenues from increased selling totaling $4 billion over the next two years, would lose $71 billion from 1991 to 1999, including a $9 billion loss in fiscal 1999. That's more than the cost of the S&L bailout over the same period, more than the Stealth bomber.

During the presidential campaign, Bush argued that the experience after the capital gains rate was cut in 1978 supports his claim, and he frequently cited two studies, one by former Council of Economic Advisers Chairman Martin Feldstein, the other by Lawrence Lindsey, now working at the Treasury. But these analyses look ludicrous when compared with the historical record.

For example, Feldstein predicted, using his mathematical model, that reported capital gains would triple as a result of the 1978 capital gains tax cut. But nothing of the sort occurred. From 1977 to 1981 reported capital gains increased by 76 percent, about 1.4 times the 53 percent growth in GNP. That relationship compares unfavorably with, say, the experience from 1954 to 1967, when the GNP grew by 120 percent and capital gains realizations went up by 2.4 times as much—with no change at all in the top capital gains tax rate.

In an article published in 1987, Lindsey confidently predicted that, as a result of the 1986 repeal of the capital gains tax break, reported capital gains would plummet by close to half—permanently. From about $165 billion in 1985, he estimated that reported gains would fall to only $83.6 billion in 1987. In reality, however, reported capital gains in 1987 were $137 billion—despite substantial shifting of gains into 1986 as investors rushed to take advantage of the loophole before it expired. Reported gains are expected to exceed $200 billion annually by 1990.

Probably the biggest reason reported capital gains went up after the 1978 and 1981 tax cuts was a long-awaited surge in stock prices. But you can't credit the capital gains tax cuts with the rise in the stock market. Most of the increase occurred well after the tax cuts took effect, and stock prices have grown at a slightly higher annual rate (11.9 percent compared with 10.5 percent) since the top capital gains tax rate was increased from 20 percent to 28 percent starting in 1987.

The tax cuts of 1978 and 1981 almost certainly did boost reported capital gains in one way. Reported tax shelter "losses" grew from less than $10 billion a year in the late 1970s to $100 billion in 1986, the last year before tax reform. The way most tax shelters worked was to let you deduct an ordinary income "loss" while reporting a gain at the lower capital gains rate. Much of the increase in reported capital gains was not new economic activity but merely the flip side of tax shelter "losses." If you gave a special tax break to people who burned the American flag, taxes from flag burners would go up (as more people desecrated the flag to be eligible for the tax break) but total tax revenues would go down. And it certainly wouldn't prove that tax breaks for flag burners increase economic productivity.

The Bush administration *is* right that because people don't pay the tax until they sell their investments, the capital gains tax can affect people's thinking about when to sell. (This is that "lock-in" effect mentioned above.) Why do investors sell capital assets? Often these days the sale is forced. The recent wave of leveraged buyouts, for example, led to more than $100 billion a year in corporate stock retirements over the past five years. Sometimes people need the money—for example, to pay for children's education, medical bills, or more frivolous consumption. But sometimes they sell because they think another investment might be more profitable. It is this third category of decision that might be affected by having to pay a capital gains tax if they switch but none if they stay put. A lower capital gains tax would reduce this friction in the system, making the economy slightly more efficient. Could it conceivably even increase tax revenues if people take to selling their investments "early and often"?

The proposal of dissident Ways and Means Democrats—to knock down the capital gains tax rate for two years, then put it back up again—is a ridiculous parody of this idea. Obviously if the government gives investors a two-year window in which to pay a lower rate, they will be tempted to cash in now—even if it means immediately rebuying the same stock. But the money collected that way is money that won't be collected later. The government would simply be raiding its own future revenues. It is exactly like offering people

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30 percent off next year's taxes, provided they pay in advance, then claiming you've found a great new revenue source.

But what about the "unlocking" effect of a permanent capital gains tax reduction, as proposed by Bush? Treasury analysts admit that increased buying and selling of assets that would have been sold at some point anyway will not lead to a long-run increase in federal revenues. But they make an important point: more than three-quarters of all capital gains are never taxed at all! Some of this reflects cheating, but the main reason is another loophole involving inherited property. If you hold an asset until you die, the increase in value during your lifetime escapes tax. Your heirs, when they sell the asset, pay capital gains tax only on any increase in value since they acquired it.

It is this loophole—the knowledge that if you never sell the property at all, your gain will never be taxed—that is most responsible for the "lock-in" effect. If the administration were truly concerned with unlocking those capital gains, it would advocate a simple reform: taxing all accrued capital gains at death, before the property is passed on. This would also bring in a nice bit of change: more than $5 billion a year, according to the Congressional Budget Office. (Yes, yes, special arrangements could be made if necessary for inherited farms and small businesses.) President Kennedy—whose advocacy of a capital gains tax cut is incessantly invoked by advocates in the current debate—proposed this reform in tandem. (In fact, he got neither.)

What about the idea of indexing capital gains to reflect inflation? Isn't that only fair? After all, if someone buys stock for $100 and sells it for $150 when the general price level has risen by 50 percent, there's no real gain. The dissident Democrats' indexing plan would apply only to inflation after 1991, so that its effects would be small at first, but grow over time. Once it was fully phased in, in the hypothetical example just cited, no tax would be due.

The trouble with indexing is that it's not fair to index just part of the tax code. Why, for example, is it fair to index capital gains and not interest on savings accounts—the little guy's form of investment? After all, a person earning eight percent when inflation is five percent really is clearing only three percent. Furthermore, the savings account holder must pay taxes on her profits every year, whether she withdraws them or not, whereas an investment whose profit is deemed to be a "capital gain" can accrue tax-free until it is cashed in.

Most important, you cannot reasonably index profits from asset sales unless you also index borrowing costs. If people can buy an asset with borrowed money, fully deduct the interest, but pay taxes on the profit only to the extent it exceeds inflation, they will be able to have their inflationary cake and eat it too. The mismatch between unindexed interest deductions and indexed gains will create grotesque opportunities for tax shelters. Unless someone devises a technically and politically acceptable way both to tax unrealized gains and to index interest deductions, indexing capital gains would be bad tax policy, bad budget policy, and bad economics.

The same is true of *any* special break for capital gains. The two tests of any tax policy are fairness and economic efficiency. The capital gains break flunks both. It's hard to believe that we're having this argument once again, and even harder to believe that the Democrats are on the verge of losing it.

Why all economic news is bad.

The Sky Is Always Falling

By Gregg Easterbrook

Better sit down and brace yourself: there's an economic trend in progress. It's bad, real bad. What trend? Makes no difference.

Let's take employment. U.S. ECONOMY ADDS 400,000 JOBS IN MONTH: REPORT SPURS FEARS, declaimed the *Washington Post* last February. Some economic naïf might consider job growth to be good news. To the cognoscenti, though, it was a frightening omen: high employment might inspire the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates, the *Post* worried. In March, as unemployment fell to its lowest level since the early 1970s, the *Post* grumped that the Fed would surely have to raise rates now, "since its efforts so far have done little to slow the economy." Talk about a record of shame—failure to slow the economy! CBS, reporting the record employment, warned, "Things may not be as rosy as they

GREGG EASTERBROOK is a contributing editor of *Newsweek* and the *Atlantic*.

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seem"—because low joblessness might inspire workers to expect higher wages. You probably thought higher wages for workers was a good thing. Novice! Of course, later when employment expansion slowed somewhat, that was bad too: APRIL JOB GROWTH EASED DECISIVELY, STIRRING CONCERN, the *New York Times* warned.

Let's take the trade deficit. Last year it declined by $43 billion, the first drop since 1980. Remember how really, really bad a growing trade deficit was supposed to be? Well, a shrinking deficit is bad too. "Analysts said [improved] exports . . . would be likely to intensify pressure at the Federal Reserve to continue measures to curb rising inflation," the *Times* groaned. Let's take the dollar. Remember all those stories of the early 1980s about how really, really, really bad it was that the dollar was so high? Well, more recently, until the past few months, the dollar sank. That also was really, really, really bad. STOCKS, BONDS AND DOLLAR SLUMP, the *Wall Street Journal* moaned in February. "Investors' fear of a shaky dollar [is] clearly evident," the story said. "Growing doubts that the Bush administration can solve the nation's budget deficit . . . threatens the dollar's stability, which in turn drives foreign investors away from U.S. financial markets." If you'd been reading all those stories about how really, really bad it is that foreigners are investing so heavily in America, perhaps your consciousness will be raised by the revelation that it's really, really bad that they may stop.

Then through 1989 the dollar rebounded nicely, rising 19 percent against the yen. At long last, good news? Amateur! CONCERN OVER STRONG DOLLAR HELPS INDUSTRIALS TO 15-POINT DECLINE, the *Journal* headlined. "Investors are worried about the harmful effects of the stronger dollar" because it would depress the earnings of multinational companies with overseas operations generating profits in other currencies. The *Times* echoed this apprehension with a front-page story, STRONG DOLLAR MAY CUT PRICES BUT LOWERS PROFITS AS WELL. "Surprisingly rapid [dollar gains] raise concerns about the ability of the U.S. and its economic allies to maintain stability in the $400 billion foreign exchange markets," the article said. It's bad that a government that can't drive down the value of its own currency? Should we envy those Eastern bloc nations that have never had this problem?

Remember when the papers were full of laments that high housing prices were freezing out first-time buyers? Now that the housing market is stalling, there are woeful tales of young homeowners unable to trade up because they can't realize the big profits they were "counting on." Remember when it was really, truly, incredibly bad that Japan's Ministry of International Trade and

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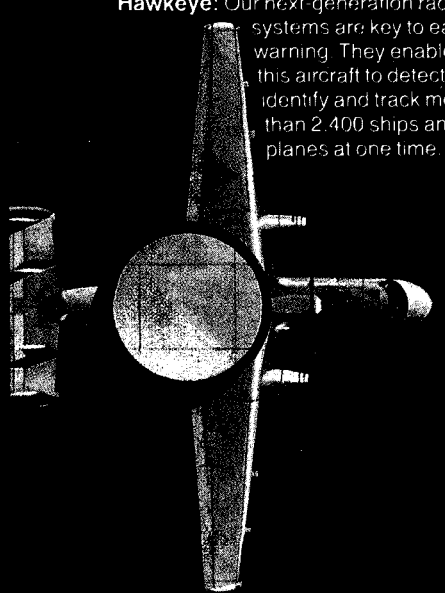

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Industry was so potent? PROBLEMS OF THE MINISTRY THAT MASTERMINDED JAPAN'S RISE MAY BE BAD NEWS FOR AMERICA, a recent *Times* headline disclosed. Seems that Japanese companies are growing sufficiently confident to act independent of government hand-holding, which according to the story will make them even more awesome competitors—though this is how U.S. companies already behave, and the bad-news line is that it puts our guys at a disadvantage against MITI-supervised outfits.

You may recall that during the 1970s high oil prices were considered less than optimal. Now that prices are down, that's a crisis too. This February the *Times* lamented in a banner story that the price of oil has "slumped": bad, because it makes domestic oil exploration unprofitable compared with buying petroleum from foreign suppliers with lower costs. Though when oil prices poked up after the Exxon Valdez, that was bad too. COFFEE PRICES AT 8-YEAR LOW AFTER BRAZIL IS SPARED FROST, the *Times* recently noted. Should we raise our mugs in a toast? Not at all. The *Times* sympathized with "a battered market" upset because "an expected freeze in the Brazilian coffee fields had not materialized."

Throughout 1989 a furious contest of doom has swirled around whether the economy should be interpreted as heading toward a recession, runaway inflation, or a "soft landing" combining moderate reductions in growth with moderate inflation. The soft landing is what everyone wants, but rooting for it involves cheering signs of a slump, leading to some bizarre analysis. "Investors, worried by the prospect of continued strong growth . . . reacted negatively" to a batch of favorable numbers, the *Post* reported in March. "[The] report did little to confirm widespread speculations that the economy is slowing," the *Journal* complained in April about some employment statistics. By June the *Journal* was warning, SOFT LANDING MAY BE THREATENED BY CONSUMERS, who mischievously continued to make and spend money against economists' wishes.

STOCKS FALL SHARPLY AS INFLATION FEARS RISE, the *Post* headline declared on March 18. Four days later the same paper reported that "inflation fears that had gripped the nation's financial markets subsided yesterday." The very next day they were back, embodied in a March 23 *Times* article, FEAR MOUNTS THAT INFLATION THREATENS WORLD ECONOMY. That was on page one of the business section. On page 16 a different article stated, "The fact that the Federal Reserve has for the time being seemed to dampen inflation fears came as a surprise to some analysts." Possibly the ones who read the story on page one.

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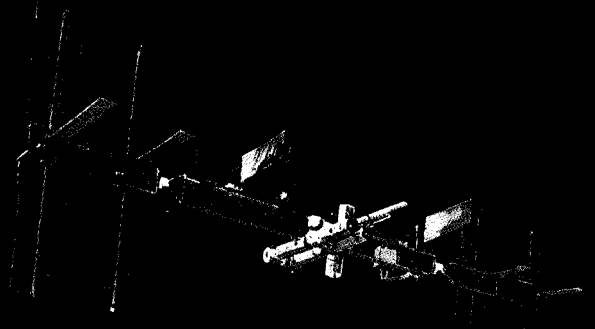

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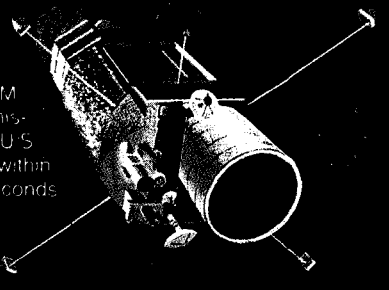

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By April another front-page *Times* article on menacing inflation began by quoting an economist as saying, "It's clear that we have escalated to a higher inflation plane." In early July the *Times* shifted ground: RECESSION FEARS GROWING. "With every day bringing new evidence of economic slowdown, the danger of recession has abruptly replaced inflation as the chief threat to the economy in the minds of many economists and even at the Federal Reserve," a story warned. On the day this story was published the annualized inflation rate remained approximately where it had been during the winter inflation-scare stories, and most statistics indicated the economy continued to grow. STOCK NOSE DIVE ON RECESSION FEARS, the *Journal* chimed in: "Analysts said they are detecting a fundamental shift in attitude among stock investors who since late last year had greeted signs of a slowing economy with big stock market rallies." The *Post* was having none of it: ECONOMISTS SEE LITTLE CHANCE OF SEVERE RECESSION, the paper declared two days after the *Times* had drawn the opposite conclusion, by the presumably more rigorous technique of looking directly into economists' minds.

Then the impossible happened: June economic indicators seemed to announce precisely what everybody had been calling for, a soft landing. Released on July 14, the figures showed the Producer Price Index declining for the first time in 18 months, suggesting moderation of inflation; with GNP growth remaining positive but slow-

A Bad-News Quiz

1. Low unemployment is bad because:
   a. This might cause the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates. (*Washington Post*, March 11)
   b. Workers will demand higher wages. (CBS, March 10)
   c. It "signals an alarmingly tight labor market." (*Wall Street Journal*, April 11)

2. Increased disposable income is bad because:
   a. This could mean more consumer spending, which might increase inflation. (*Wall Street Journal*, June 19)
   b. Pay boosts merely push up living costs. (*Washington Post*, February 2)
   c. "Consumers have been slowing their spending, but not quickly enough." (*Wall Street Journal*, June 5)

3. The declining U.S. trade deficit is bad because:
   a. This might cause the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates. (*New York Times*, February 18)
   b. U.S. economic health makes the dollar more attractive to foreign investors. (*Washington Post*, May 18)
   c. Current trade gains are illusory anyway, since the situation may change sometime in the 1990s. (*New York Times*, June 19)

4. Continuing economic growth is bad because:
   a. This might cause the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates. (*Washington Post*, March 11)
   b. "The U.S. economy is running full steam ahead . . . this is not a good environment for bonds." (*Wall Street Journal*, March 14)
   c. Rapid growth makes the stock market uncomfortable. (*Washington Post*, April 19)

5. Signs of moderating inflation are bad because:
   a. They are "at best a temporary respite." (*New York Times*, March 23)
   b. Low inflation drives down the stock market. (*Wall Street Journal*, April 2)
   c. Low inflation may push the stock market to artificial heights. (CBS, April 18)

6. Recent high corporate profits are bad because:
   a. The increase may only be "spurious." (*Washington Post*, April 22)
   b. Failure to reinvest the higher profits could reduce competitiveness of firms, setting in motion "a wave of [corporate] bankruptcies in the next decade." (*Washington Post*, February 12)
   c. Companies may issue larger dividends, increasing disposable income. (*New York Times*, February 13)

7. A strong dollar is bad because:
   a. This might cause the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates. (*Wall Street Journal*, March 14)
   b. It "adds new uncertainties to the outlook for business." (*New York Times*, June 19)
   c. U.S. government officials are embarrassed that they have so much difficulty driving down the value of their currency. (Ditto above.)

8. A weak dollar is bad because:
   a. This might cause the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates. (*Washington Post*, January 29)
   b. Consumer prices would rise, triggering inflation. (*Wall Street Journal*, June 12)
   c. U.S. exports would increase, and "this could tend to lull people to sleep" about the danger of future declines in U.S. exports. (*New York Times*, June 19)

9. Higher interest rates would be bad because:
   a. They would slow the economy, reducing employment and disposable income. (*New York Times*, July 7)
   b. They would depress the stock market. (*Washington Post*, February 25)
   c. They would inflate the stock market. (*Wall Street Journal*, June 12)

G. E.

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ing, suggesting a controlled cooling off. Good tidings at last? PRODUCER PRICES FELL LAST MONTH BUT NEWS NOT AS GOOD AS IT SEEMS, ECONOMISTS SAY, the *Times* pouted. "On the surface," the *Post* joined in, "the price news was even better than most analysts expected. But . . . June data may be read as less reassuring." This report followed up with some blather about "an unusual 8 percent jump in ship prices" and laments that though mere energy and food costs had fallen, cigarette prices had gone up. The *Journal* went furthest: JUNE STATISTICS HAVE AN UGLY SIDE, BRINGING INDICATORS OF STAGFLATION. Exactly what the *Journal* had been pleading for all winter—slowed growth—was suddenly bad because it might be combined with higher inflation after all. It happens that the June statistics did not show increasing inflation. But torture numbers and they'll confess to anything. "The data, looked at from a slightly different angle," the *Journal* reproved—that is, from upside down—"display an ominous side. The core rate of inflation, the Producer Price Index minus its volatile food and energy components, is accelerating." In other words, if you subtract whatever numbers are going down, the remainder are going up. During the winter, when energy prices were accelerating, no major news organization told its audience, "Well, if you discount for these volatile energy prices, there's no inflation problem."

One force at play in these follies is, of course, the simple desire for bad news. The sentiment that disaster is a great story while normalcy is boring animates not just the media but Congress, where congressional hearings and members' statements enthusiastically embrace that day's sky-is-falling economic line.

The fact that such a line is always available reflects a central truth about economics: almost any economic development is both good *and* bad—good in some ways, bad in others. An expanding economy reduces unemployment, but at some point risks inflation. A strong dollar makes consumer goods cheaper (reducing inflation), but makes American products less competitive. Not only does a change in one direction in any economic variable—interest rates, commodity prices, etc.—create its own pros and cons. It also creates the possibility that policy-makers will throw the machine into reverse, producing exactly the opposite pros and cons. (Too-vigorous growth, for example, will lead the Fed to tighten and risk recession.)

If you're determined to concentrate on the cons, there is always a full panoply to choose from. On the other hand, relentless emphasis on the good news in any set of economic statistics—the general approach of whoever happens to be in the White House—can be just as fatuous as relentless emphasis on the bad news, and somewhat more dangerous. It's true that perhaps 95 percent of economic doomsday edicts turn on constructions like "could lead to," "might cause," "analysts warned of possible" (after all, most of the hard economic news has been good for nigh on half a century now). But sometimes it makes sense to risk today's good news to avoid tomorrow's bad news. That unpleasant but necessary job is generally left to the Federal Reserve Board.

However, Fed worship is an additional factor that distinguishes economic coverage from the normal journalists' preference for bad news. The Fed is a big, impressive, mysterious organization with power and the freedom to act, increasingly rare in Washington. A large fraction of economic gloom stories turns on speculation that this trend or that may cause the Fed to move interest rates this way or the other.

For journalists the Fed provides that useful device, the narrative. Network editors like to imagine that Washington is a sort of master control room of the type found in James Bond movies, where awesomely powerful figures sit before huge panels and radar screens, turning dials that control the course of human events. Few Washington reporters, however sophisticated, can avoid resorting to that sort of imagery every now and then. Thus the president, for example, is sometimes made to appear in control of foreign affairs.

But when it comes to economics, who's the mad genius? Presidents from Truman to Bush have seemed perpetually baffled by the course of events: their predictions forever off the mark, their attempts at control summed up by Gerald Ford's WIN button. Officials of the Council of Economic Advisers and similar organizations continuously contradict themselves; a new economic breeze blows through the halls of Congress on an almost daily basis. Only the Fed can be made to seem "in charge" of the economy. Stories can focus endlessly on whether the Fed will "act," and if so, how. Fed actions also offer a simple, easy focus in public appearances by Chairman Alan Greenspan before congressional committees.

It is, however, the nature of the economy to frustrate those programmed to look for discrete connections of cause and effect. Recently the *Post* ran a goofy set of "near consensus of economists" charts purporting to forecast down to fractions of percentage points where inflation and growth would be in 1990. At a time when economists can't even agree on something so basic as whether the economy is expanding or contracting, declaring that annualized CPI increases will be exactly 4.6 percent in the fourth quarter 1990 is about as useful as predicting the final score of the 1990 Super Bowl will be 27-20. And about as likely to be correct. Stock market coverage follows the same pattern. STOCKS OFF SLIGHTLY AFTER DRIFTING AIMLESSLY, a *Post* headline from February, nicely captures the mindset that believes the direction of stock prices ought to have some *purpose*, dammit, and not just "drift aimlessly" like an irresponsible teenager.

But if the general propensity is to find the cloud for every silver lining, an occasional bizarre shaft of sunlight will pierce the gloom. My nominee for economic headline of 1989 (so far) comes from the *New York Times*: ISRAELIS VIEW A BATTERED ECONOMY AS MOTIVATION FOR A PEACE EFFORT. Seen in that light, may all the world's nations be blessed with economic collapse. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Winding Along to Wedlock

Nora Ephron's romantic comedy **When Harry Met Sally...** (Columbia) is very entertaining. Also, like many pictures of no serious intent, it discloses some facts about America and American film.

First, its two leading performers, both highly competent, are not stars in the traditional sense. Traditional romantic comedy is engaging in spite of, or in addition to, its story—in the interplay between Cary Grant and Irene Dunne, Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert, James Stewart and Jean Arthur, among others. The stories are usually good enough, but their chief function is to allow us to spend time in the company of the two stars, to enjoy the rosy magic between them. *When Harry Met Sally . . .* abjures that aim, possibly willy-nilly, and concentrates on the script, depending much less on personality to hold us. The film succeeds, but it's a different order of being from star romance.

Billy Crystal, the leading man, is a deft comedian with some blunt, prosy appeal. He can use the rhythms and inflections of contemporary speech the way a juggler uses household objects. But he has no depth of personality. He epitomizes the post-Dustin Hoffman leading man who relies more on performance than on personal magnetism. By now this is so common in our films that Crystal's appearance in a romantic lead—which would have been unthinkable 25 years ago—is not remarkable.

Neither is the fact that he is markedly Jewish in intonation and gesture. Years ago Woody Allen pretty well demolished prejudice against Jewish leading men, but Allen plays Jews, as such, in character name and reference. Crystal's character is named Harry Burns—deliberately indeterminate—and though a few Yiddish words are in his dialogue, they are by now non-denominational. Yet he seems patently Jewish. I'm harping on this subject because the film assumes that there is now no bar to such a man as vicar for a wide public's fantasies or experiences. (When a film like this is dubbed abroad, how do they get the Jewishness? Do they try?)

Meg Ryan, the female lead, is much more conventional. If Ginger Rogers had ever been alive in between her (lovely) dances, Ryan would resemble her, except that Ryan is flexible and witty. Still, what we see is more or less what we get: she doesn't carry with her a playground for our imaginations as real stars do. She is simply—if that's the word—a nimble comic actress who is pretty, on the order of Shelley Long.

Another cultural fact contained in this film: Ephron wrote it for the screen. (Others now say that they contributed to the script, but Ephron gets sole credit. So for convenience, if not justice, let's use Ephron as the name of a conglomerate.) The screen has had breezy romantic-comic fluff ever since sound came in, but very often such films were made from Broadway hits or else the writer had been a Broadway playwright. An Ephron of 25 years ago, with her gift for repartee and her knack for recognition factors in current courting behavior, might have chosen to go through Broadway to the coast. Not now; Ephron, to my knowledge, has not written plays.

In every age there are centers of cultural energy, and very little of such energy is now centered on the writing of Broadway comedies. The bottleneck of Broadway no longer seems worth the squeeze. The light-comic energy now goes directly to Hollywood and TV. Getting a screenplay produced is hardly easy or inevitable, but for writers of this sort of material, the Hollywood game is worth the candle, much more than the big-time theater. It's possible to imagine *Harry Met Sally* in Broadway play form; it even has a small resemblance to Bernard Slade's *Same Time, Next Year* of Broadway fame—but that was 1975, which is history.

I call this picture the writer's because it wouldn't begin to exist without its dialogue. The plot is highly unoriginal: two people meet in 1977, then re-meet at five-year intervals up to 1987. After disliking each other, then liking each other to the point of going to bed once, then splitting again, they finally hook up. The plot has pretenses to "meaning"—inves-

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Dead Poets Society. *Prep-school boys take great literature seriously, urged on by their teacher Robin Williams, and meet the consequences. Familiar patterns, nicely worked out. (Reviewed 6/26/89)* **Do the Right Thing**. *A blockbuster about a Brooklyn block. Spike Lee's masterly directing and writing explore a black community and black-white feelings. The closing violence is unsettling in more than one way. (7/3/89)* **Lawrence of Arabia**. *Seize the chance to see the reconstituted original on a wide screen with stereophonic sound. It's wonderful. (2/20/89)* **A Taxing Woman's Return**. *The same director and actress who made* A Taxing Woman *once again pursue tax evaders in Tokyo. The same stimulating mixture of comedy, violence, sex, and cynicism. And, like the first, a bit too long. (8/7&14/89)* **—SK**

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tigating whether a man and woman can just be friends, etc.—but these are only scaffoldings for the funny stuff. The ploy also has well-worn strophes, like the second leads: his friend (Bruno Kirby) and her friend (Carrie Fisher), who hook up even before the main pair, as contrapuntal prediction. And most worn of all, a bit near the end where Crystal runs through the streets, after he has had a flash of truth, to reach and reclaim Ryan. None of these things gets in the way of Ephron's dialogue, which is like a string of small firecrackers (surprisingly few duds), with a few not-so-small ones.

Sometimes Ephron stretches the limits of even the loose realism in this kind of film. For instance, Ryan and Crystal are having a meal in a crowded coffee shop when he brags that he has never left a woman unsatisfied. She asks how he can be sure, and he replies smugly, "I know." To prove that he doesn't, she then simulates—full voice, in this crowded place—a woman having intercourse and reaching climax, while the other customers stare at her. Just a bit hard to believe that she would have done the imitation there and then. (It does lead, however, to what's already celebrated as the film's funniest line.)

This story of cautious but eventual union, which begins at the University of Chicago but spends most of its time in Manhattan, is interlarded with choric sequences by six elderly couples—half of whom are Jewish, too. Beginning with the very start of the picture and occurring throughout, we see the old married folks, one pair at a time, telling us how they met and married and were happy. All but one of the couples met and married young and have lived long together. They contrast of course with the central story. The old folks represent a time when "commitment" was not a dirty word. We all know that marriage doesn't always work out as cheerily as it did with these couples, but Ephron is giving us attitudes, not statistics. And, naturally, the last shot of the film is Ryan and Crystal sitting together after 12 years of marriage, telling us about it. They've joined the throng.

Another old-timey fact. Most sound tracks these days are crammed with up-to-the-minute music. On the *Harry Met Sally* track, there are 22 songs, or fragments of them, and every one is an oldie. Through these songs, as through those elderly couples, the film poses older (presumable) illusions against today's (presumable) clear-headedness.

Still another dated factor. The film rests on the assumption that marriage is the state toward which everyone basically aspires, especially women. A man is the solution for a woman's problems. Feminist hackles, prepare to rise.

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edited by Ted Galen Carpenter

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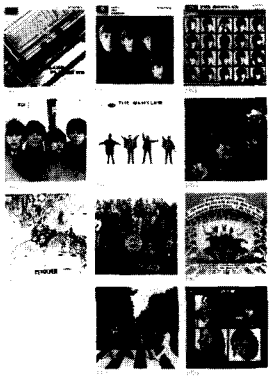

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Rob Reiner, the director, showed in *This Is Spinal Tap* that he has a prime requisite for comedy, the ability to stay just a fraction ahead of the audience in an enticing way. He shows it again here, along with some warmth for the purring moments. He pulls everything together adroitly to make *Harry Met Sally* a real refreshment. It's what they call a summer picture, which means that, if it's good—as this one is—it will seem summery even in winter.

Robert Brustein on Theater

Transforming Actors and Star Personalities

Laurence Olivier is dead, but the theater values he so persistently represented expired long before his death. He was first and foremost a stage actor. Only serious illness could keep him off the boards, and during the last 20 years of his life he suffered a host of afflictions, including cancer and kidney failure. But I suspect the real coup de grace came when he was summarily dismissed as artistic director of the National Theatre, at the age of 60, just before the completion of the new complex on the South Bank. Instead of giving him a gold watch, they gave his name to the largest of the theaters, and he accepted the sops and tributes with the natural grace of a theatrical nobleman. But he had led his followers to a peak in Pisgah only to be denied access to the milk and honey, and his bitterness was henceforth etched into the very set of his features, particularly in the lines around his mouth. One of the saddest things about Olivier's old age—a sadness recorded in his last films—was the way his sleepy, humorous eyes became a hooded death stare, the way his strong dimpled facial structure was frozen into a hollow-cheeked, narrow-lipped mask.

We're not supposed to regret the fact that the greatest actor of his age—the fateful Oedipus, the heroic Hotspur, the miserly Tyrone, the majestic Othello, the broken Shylock—was eventually reduced to playing second-rate villains in third-rate movies. Olivier pretended not to regret it—he had an obligation to feed his family—but his last book aches with regret over all those now inaccessible Shakespearean roles to which he had devoted his life. It was Olivier's decision, in the 1940s, to abandon a successful career as one of Hollywood's English silk merchants and return to acting classics with the Old Vic. Of course he made movies during these years, but only to bring Shakespeare to larger audiences with his panoramic versions of *Henry V*, *Hamlet*, and *Richard III*.

Olivier's art belonged to the stage because it was an art of transformation. Much has been said about the way he worked from the outside in—first choosing a nose, a wig, or a set of false teeth, and then discovering the inner character. This usually rankled American Method actors, who work from the self, if not from the personality. The Strasberg Method rankled Olivier in turn, not because he scorned Stanislavsky but because he valued the actor too much to tolerate any fingering of his psyche. Stanislavsky himself abandoned emotional memory exercises, and probably for the same reason. They were not only an invasion of the actor's private life, they were an obstacle to transformation. How do you discover the thundering dimensions of Lear in the inner folds of your own meager experience?

A story repeated in most of the obituaries epitomizes Olivier's attitude toward the Method. Watching Dustin Hoffman's elaborate preparations for his role in *Marathon Man*, he said: "My dear fellow, have you tried acting?" Hoffman is perfectly capable of acting, even of transformation. So are a number of his Method colleagues, as demonstrated by Brando's sclerotic Godfather and De Niro's ballooning Raging Bull. But however deep these performances, the Method usually limits an actor's range to contemporary proletarian types, which is why so few perform on the stage, much less in classical roles. Still, the conflict was not between classical and modern acting. Olivier was brilliant in contemporary plays (perhaps at his most brilliant in *The Entertainer* as the seedy vaudevillian Archie Rice). The issue was over how closely you need to fit the roles to your personality, whether you wear the mask of an actor or the face of a star.

Olivier, who had no qualms about exploiting his charisma, had no interest whatever in featuring his personality (indeed, he often said he didn't have one). That is why he was virtually unrecognizable in each of his parts. In his acting, he followed Button Molder's advice to Peer Gynt: "To be yourself, you must slay yourself." Ibsen was describing the moral strength that separates the egotist from the artist, and Olivier embodied that strength throughout his career. He didn't just slay his personality with his makeup box. He did it through intelligent examination of the text, through the free exercise of his imagination.

His love of transformation was such that he had an absolute terror of repeating himself. Indeed, his passion for change even extended to changes in the direction of his theater. Late in life, under the influence of his literary manager, Kenneth Tynan, Olivier proved willing to adapt his aristocratic theatrical style to the roughneck world of Osborne, Wesker, Pinter, and Griffith—a Lord of the Realm playing working-class characters while his fellow knights, Sir Ralph and Sir John, were still employing old-laddie diction and received pronunciation. He also had the good sense to invite into his company many actors from the new theater—Albert Finney, Robert Stephens, Colin Blakeley, and Joan Plowright of Wesker's *Roots*, contracting with Miss Plowright a happy marriage that, incidentally, symbolized the wedding of the old theater with the new.

His performance in Trevor Griffith's *The Party* in the 1970s was Olivier's last appearance on the stage. A series of four consecutive flops at the National, plus a few shocks administered by Tynan, had convinced Lord Rayne to turn the theater over to Peter Hall. Olivier had hardly been the most adventurous artistic director in Europe, but by contrast with Hall's cautious tenure he now seems almost daring. Most important, he made us believe that theater mattered, having been responsible for productions that not only galvanized the past but (with Tynan prodding him) tried to reflect the form and pressure of contemporary life.

Olivier, in Tynan's words, was "pragmatic, empirical, wary of grand designs or distant goals." He was at heart neither activist nor visionary but actually somewhat traditional, even conservative. Yet he understood as well as anyone in our time the social, aesthetic, and communal importance of theater. He knew how closely it resembled society, how intimately its fate was connected to human development. He realized that the conduct of the actor was, in some way, a microcosm of the way people behave in their lives, and that an artist's dedication to his calling reflected a larger loyalty that is the mucilage of the collective spirit. Great as they were, Olivier's stage performances may fade from memory, since theater is ephemeral. What will never fade, I think, is his rare exemplary belief in the transforming power of the actor's art.

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If only that example had informed some of the acting in the new **Twelfth Night** currently on view at the New York Shakespeare Festival in Central Park. For this, the tenth entry in his Shakespeare Marathon, Joseph Papp has engaged not a director but an acting coach, Harold Guskin, who is responsible for everything Olivier recoiled from in American theater. Guskin, a program note tells us, has been conducting a Shakespeare Workshop at the Public Theater "so that actors from stage, film, and television would have a place to explore acting the great roles in classical plays." This undertaking, worthy enough in theory, seems largely a pretext to attract vacationing celebrities, and the production has enough stars to decorate the dome of the Hayden Planetarium. The problem is that so few of these luminaries have the aptitude or experience to act in *Twelfth Night*.

I am disheartened by this production—and also a little bewildered. Papp doesn't need names to sell free Shakespeare, and even if he did, he has been in the business long enough to attract those with classical experience. Christopher Walken, Mandy Patinkin, Kevin Kline, Diane Venora, and others have lent considerable distinction to Papp's Shakespeare in recent months. Yet most of the people currently on the Central Park stage are distinguished only for demonstrating the difference between classical and personality acting.

If most of the white performers seem to have been cast because they are movie stars (an exception is the stage-trained Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio, humorously hiking up her crotch as the disguised Viola), some of the black actors seem to have been cast because they are black (the exception is Andre Braugher, a virile Antonio). Papp's non-traditional casting policy is an admirable one, but too often it gets confused with affirmative action. I thought the purpose of this policy was to choose the best actor available for a role, regardless of race—not to cast classically unskilled talent for the sake of a more visible racial mixture.

What's happening onstage in this *Twelfth Night* suggests everything that's wrong with contemporary American theater—its confusion of celebrity with artistry and art with sociology, its contempt for training, its absence of forceful ideas, its irrelevance and timidity. Guskin's relationship to the actor in this production is what I imagine Paula Strasberg's was to Marilyn Monroe—shepherding a difficult temperament through the knotty undergrowth of collaborative projects without letting burrs stick to her stockings. The text is not interpreted so much as hacked aside with a machete to make way for the progress of the stars, and every little speech is a turn.

Some effort is made to place the action—John Lee Beatty's set is a garish playing surface planted in front of an Exposition gambling casino in Monaco around the turn of the century; but since the entire show takes place in an exterior square, even the soliloquies seem to be public pronouncements. Worse, the historical setting is continually being undermined by Jeff Goldblum, who substitutes his own simpering Brundlefly vanity for Malvolio's foolish pomposity, garbling his most important lines when he is not misunderstanding them; by Michelle Pfeiffer's wide-eyed blankness as Olivia; and by Gregory Hines's compulsion to charm the audience rather than investigate the sour side of Festes (though Hines at least has grace, humor, and style). As for Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, they don't seem to know what their lines mean, much less how to stress them (and the actor playing Sir Toby should not attempt a drunken scene again until he learns that drunks don't pitch from side to side, but walk with extra carefulness).

In order to avoid realizing the helter-skelter implications of its subtitle (*What You Will*), *Twelfth Night* needs a director, not a talent manager. It is the airiest of

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Shakespeare's comedies, but also the one with the deepest sexual ambiguities and erotic resonances. It requires actors experienced in verse-speaking, not untrained neophytes momentarily anxious to add a Shakespeare role to their résumés. It demands, in short, the kind of dedicated transforming stage actor that Olivier personified, rather than a coterie of Hollywood tourists stuffing their marketable mannerism into a suitcase for a visit to cultural New York.

The Little Drummer Boy

BY SERGEI L. PETROV

The Russia House by John le Carré

(Knopf, 353 pp., $19.95)

Nobody reads spy novels to find out how intelligence agencies really work, or why they're needed. Such novels are, as Graham Greene maintains, entertainments. And the mystical dance of shady characters in John le Carré's novels has always had a magic of its own, which set it apart not only from real life, but also from most other fiction. But *The Russia House* is different. It is quite candid about its intention to do more than entertain. It asks to be treated as something more than a novel.

It is a book with a message, written to convey a particular analysis of political reality, and to influence opinion. Its message is perfectly captured by its epigraph, from Dwight D. Eisenhower: "Indeed, I think that people want peace so much that one of these days governments had better get out of their way and let them have it." Le Carré expands upon his epigraph in his foreword. (It is a little telling to provide a novel with a foreword.) If musicians and artists ran the world instead of politicians, he says, "I should have no more conflicts to write about." In fact, le Carré never really wrote about conflicts, at least in the geopolitical sense; he wrote to reduce those conflicts to psychological ones, in which higher purposes were considered cynically.

Most of the action in *The Russia House* takes place in the Soviet Union after the advent of *perestroika* and *glasnost*. The narrative is dominated by such sensitive matters as nuclear war and the survival of mankind. Given the current fascination with developments in the Soviet Union, it is inevitable that for many readers *The Russia House* will serve as a source of information on a variety of Soviet subjects, from everyday life under Gorbachev to the details of arms control and disarmament. (In his foreword, le Carré thanks a number of experts for their help.) A novel by a master of suspense is an attractive way to learn about such things. The problem is that the picture of the real world presented in *The Russia House* is fundamentally wrong.

Yakov Savelyev, a Russian scientist, tries to pass top secret information about the inaccuracy and the unreliability of Soviet nuclear missiles and warheads to Barley Scott Blair, a British publisher. Yakov wants to persuade people in the West that their fear of Soviet military power is misplaced, that the Soviet nuclear threat is a myth, that the greatest military secret in the Soviet Union is its military backwardness. But Western intelligence agencies acquire Savelyev's manuscript, and set out to establish whether its information is genuine or a sophisticated Soviet deceit.

Barley meets Yakov by chance at a party held for what the author calls Moscow's "arty nomenklatura." After a good deal of drink, Barley delivers an impromptu speech on the subject of global peace and disarmament. ("Mr. Wonderful, that was me," he later recalls to British intelligence. "Star of the stage and screen. Western, courteous, and specious. That's why I go there, isn't it? Sovs are the only people daft enough to listen to my bullshit.") His views are, "Peace, progress, and *glasnost* by the bottleful. Instant disarmament. . . ." And later, "If there is to be hope, we must all betray our countries." Yakov hates governments and states; he does not wish to give his information about the condition of the Soviet arsenal to a foreign intelligence service. He wants his secrets to be published, and known by everyone. And so, when Yakov whispers in Barley's ear after his drunken speech, "I believe every word you said. You spoke into my heart. Promise me you are not a British spy and I'll make you a promise in return," we have a plot.

In reality, unfortunately, just the opposite happens. Idealistic Westerners come to the Soviet Union, meet idealistic Easterners (or Easterners who wish to sound idealistic), and fall for intoxicating prophecies and revelations delivered by Russians high on *perestroika* or alcohol or both. When I lived in Moscow, I met a great number of Westerners who wished to be associated with Russia one way or another for purely personal or domestic reasons, which had nothing to do with the nature of the Soviet Union, or the security of the United States, or international politics—a celebrity whose fame needed a little renovation, a businessman prepared to lose money in Moscow for the sake of publicity and profits at home, a congressman hungry for the appearance of a statesman. These people, who were often "briefed" about their destination before they landed, would hide their lack of any real knowledge of what they were dealing with behind ponderous and empty talk about a better world and mutual understanding.

Le Carré himself seems to be such a Westerner, a romanticizer of Russia. He writes in his foreword that "nobody who visits the Soviet Union in these extraordinary years, and is privileged to conduct the conversations that were granted me, can come away without an enduring love for its people and a sense of awe at the scale of the problems that face them." Surely a few weeks in Moscow at the Intourist hotel and a few meals with distinguished members of the official Writer's Union provide little basis for such sweeping pronouncements, even if a few colorful local details are gained. You will not learn from *The Russia House*, for example, that the people of the Soviet Union, for whom we are urged to feel "enduring love," are killing each other in ugly ethnic riots, or that chauvinistic Russian nationalists are becoming more organized, and their ideas more appealing to the masses, as communism in the Soviet Union declines.

There exists an abundance of "knowledge" about Russia that is based entirely on facts that are not checked and are promulgated by good and well-meaning people. Such "knowledge," on which this novel is based, agrees with itself nicely and serves a good cause, but it has nothing to do with reality. Thus, lovable Barley Blair is as good as any of le Carré's creations, as well drawn as any of the characters he has brilliantly set in the society that he truly knows and understands, but Yakov Savelyev and Katya Orlova, his lover, friend, and messenger, are utterly unbelievable, and less de-

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veloped than any of the British or American characters that appear in the book for only a sentence or two.

Yakov's father, also a scientist, died in a Soviet concentration camp. That, of course, is believable. But this is the way le Carré describes how Yakov learns about it:

> One day an old man came to Yakov's house and said he had shot Yakov's father. He had been a guard at the camp and was ordered to take part in the executions of the rebels. They were shot down in dozens by machine guns near Vorkuta railway terminal. The guard was weeping. Yakov was only 14 at the time but gave the old man his forgiveness and some vodka.

Now, prisoners in Soviet concentration camps wore only numbers without names. There is no way that a guard could have identified his victims, especially when they were killed "in dozens." Prisoners in that region above the polar circle starved and froze to death, and died from all sorts of disease or from the extraordinary brutality of the guards.

Glasnost has produced millions of previously unknown victims of the Soviet state, but it has failed to produce even one mass killer who has confessed his regret and weeps over his past. Death due to rebellion may sound romantic, but it was not at all typical. It is one of the most troublesome facts about the Soviet camps that there were few rebellions in them. There was little unity among the prisoners; many of them had been vigorous supporters of the regime who were responsible for arrests and killings before they were themselves arrested and killed.

There is a silent hero in *The Russia House*. That hero is the KGB. In his previous books, le Carré did not draw sharp distinctions between the KGB and Western intelligence agencies, but in this tendentious, breathless book he abandons the impression of equivalence for a study in black and white. The British and American intelligence services are portrayed in clinical detail, fully exposed to the light; and they are, of course, wicked and crooked. All that we learn about the KGB, however, is that "they don't break their promises." After Yakov has been arrested, Barley cuts a successful deal with the KGB. He passes a top secret document to the Soviets in return for their guarantee that Katya will not be prosecuted. His confidence in his deal is based on the fact that "he never met a Russian yet who could give his solemn word and just walk away from it. He was not talking of politics, of course—just business."

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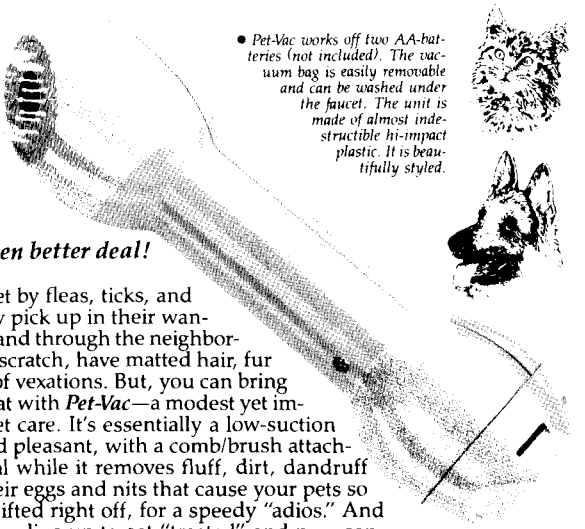

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body who has dealt with them, and even to Russians themselves, who know something about their own ability to promise and not to deliver. More important, there is plenty of accurate information about the character of the KGB and its methods that is easily available to anyone who is really interested in obtaining it. To suggest that the KGB is trustworthy, one must ignore entirely the most basic and overwhelming evidence of history. It is a little like saying that the United States is ruled by an emperor.

In fact, the similarity between the KGB and Western agencies is limited. The Western agencies have specific intelligence tasks assigned to each of them by the state, and they are accountable, in some instances even publicly, for their actions. The KGB not only has its own intelligence services, it has its own regular army, its own courts and prison system, its own industry, even its own farms so it can produce its own food. KGB representatives (not to be confused with KGB informers, who belong to a separate branch) are part of the management practically in every Soviet office, even in hospitals and taxi garages. What is so frightening about the KGB is that it is too big and too complex to serve any rational purpose, even for the goals of a totalitarian system. It is worse than evil; it is irrational. The trademark of the KGB is not just punishment without a crime, but meaningless cruelty without any reason. The slaughter of peaceful demonstrators in Tbilisi, where poison gas was used and women were killed with sharpened shovels by KGB troops, is only a recent example.

Another example of the irrationality and the wantonness of the KGB is its treatment of people who want to emigrate. I was myself arrested by the KGB because I wanted to emigrate, and interrogated by the KGB several times. The experience was educational. Three refuseniks and I demonstrated for the freedom to emigrate in front of the Supreme Soviet in November 1987. We stood there abjectly, only four people with posters; but the KGB treated our little protest as a major operation. We were ridiculously surrounded by dozens of agents in plainclothes, and by the police. (Since we had not hidden the time and the place of our action, each of us was followed around the clock by two cars and six agents for several days prior to the event.)

The arrest was carried out with the kind of gravity that would have suited the capture of terrorists about to blow up Moscow. We were taken to the nearest police station for our interrogation. Usually in such cases the KGB doesn't introduce itself, or it poses as the city police, but when I was taken to a separate room two men in their early 40s came in, flashed their KGB identifications, and introduced themselves as KGB officers. It became clear from their questions that they did not want to extract any specific information from me, they wanted to study me as a phenomenon.

No special methods were used. The officers who questioned me were intelligent. I did not respond to any of their questions. Instead I studied my interrogators, I sat and looked into their eyes. There was something strange about them that I did not understand initially. Slowly I realized that, despite all their professionalism, they were incapable of understanding what motivates a normal human being. I was in the company of incomplete, undeveloped men. Their minds seemed utterly without complexity, their personalities utterly fragmented. Without their integration into the vast structure of the KGB, they would have no integrity of their own, no coherence. They reminded me of ants in an ant colony.

Of course, all this would be news to Barley Blair, and to his creator. Le Carré is the kind of writer whose effects depend rather heavily on getting the details right, who is admired not least for the authenticity of his account. But even in his details he is not careful. (The novel reads like it was written in a hurry, perhaps because, as Yakov says, "Russia has no time.") An example: le Carré describes an "immense ornamental pool and . . . 15 naked golden nymphs, one for each of the Socialist republics" at the Exhibition of the Achievements of the National Economy of the U.S.S.R. In fact, the nymphs are not naked, they wear national costumes. And there are 16 of them; a part of Finland briefly occupied by the Russians before World War II was "privileged" to be the 16th Soviet Republic. The main pavilion has huge brass emblems of the existing 15 Soviet republics and a generic bent plate several feet in diameter to substitute for the presently independent Finland, to preserve architectural symmetry. It is crude propaganda, but it works. Most of the visitors take the words of their Soviet guides at face value. Few bother to count, or to look more closely.

The inaccuracies and the misconceptions in le Carré's book are not random. They are consistent with each other, and support old and familiar notions: that nuclear weapons themselves are the main threat to peace, that there is no fundamental difference between the superpowers, and so on. Le Carré does not add anything new to this old way of thinking. Neither he nor his heroes seem alive to the intricacies of nuclear strategy and nuclear technology. Thus it never occurs to le Carré that if Soviet missiles are indeed inaccurate and unreliable, they are more dangerous, not less dangerous, to the West; that if the reports of Soviet missile tests are falsified to please the Soviet leadership, the disclosure of this information will have extremely destabilizing effects. Le Carré does not grasp that his Russian protagonist is passing bad news, not good news.

But then le Carré simplifies all these matters to the point of meaninglessness. "When the world is destroyed, it will be destroyed not by its madmen but by the sanity of its experts and the superior ignorance of its bureaucrats," says Yakov to Barley, echoing once more the epigraph from Eisenhower. The idea is that the less you know, the better your judgment. It sounds like a noble idea. In truth, it is an idea that has been partly responsible for the grave outcome of the social engineering of Soviet communism.

"I hope that my Soviet friends will find reflected in this fable a little of the warmth that I felt in their company, and of the hopes we shared for a saner and more companionable future," writes le Carré in his foreword. They will certainly feel the warmth. And they will share the hopes for a saner and more companionable future. But when the initial euphoria about *glasnost* has been blown away, when calm analysis is possible, it may become clear that Soviet society and the Soviet economy have passed beyond the point of recovery.

Some people may still believe that a miracle will happen, that somehow things will begin to improve. But many people in the Soviet Union are stunned by how quickly things have deteriorated *since* Gorbachev began his quest for improvement. In a recent interview, Boris Yeltsin talked about the possibility of popular revolt, because tens of millions of people in the Soviet Union live far below the poverty level. And the Soviet economist Nikolai Shmelev predicts a collapse of the Soviet economy in two years. Contrary to the meliorism of *The Russia House*, the main danger to peace is not nuclear war, but the inevitable collapse of the Soviet Union. When it happens, do not count on Russia to die a noble death, to sink into solitary oblivion, to express its gratitude to the West for words of comfort and peace.

SERGEI L. PETROV, a painter and a photographer living in Washington, left the Soviet Union last April, after eight years of waiting. In the mid-'70s he was involved in Soviet ABM research.

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Paintings and Popcorn

BY JED PERL

Moving Pictures by Anne Hollander

(Knopf, 512 pp., $29.95)

The best pages of Anne Hollander's new book are intellectual high-wire acts—bold, virtuosic, and so carefully controlled as to be a little unnerving. Hollander wants to retell the history of European painting as a prehistory of the movies; and when she's going great guns, which is about half of the time in this 500-odd-page book, she uses what might be called a proto-cinematic sensibility to reconsider painters and printmakers from Van Eyck to Degas. In century after century Hollander finds artists who "turn the plane into an empty screen where action in and out and to and fro is always imminent, and the floating eye and soul are exposed to unknown possibilities." She locates the origins of this anti-architectonic type of art in Northern Europe, where the exactitude of the illuminated manuscripts and the early Netherlandish painters demonstrated that "beauty cannot be abstract." Hollander argues that these artists (and later ones such as Vermeer and Casper David Friedrich) give us "the sense of an instant full of the possibilities of the adjacent instants, a vision of the phrase in process."

Like *Seeing Through Clothes*, Hollander's acclaimed study of dress and undress through the ages, *Moving Pictures* is a history of the visual arts that sprawls across genres. Paintings and prints become pieces of evidence that tell us about the changing ways of the world. Meanwhile, whatever we already know of history, past and present, is used to elucidate the meanings of a variety of works of art. In *Seeing Through Clothes*, Hollander made ingenious use of vintage photographs and film stills to suggest transformations in social behavior. Those demonstrations of the revelatory yet non-judgmental powers of the camera may well have been the starting point for her new book. In *Moving Pictures*, the free-floating eye of the movie camera inspires a new reading of the many ways in which painting describes our relations with the world around us.

What Hollander attempts here is awfully ambitious. The subject of *Moving Pictures*—sight itself—is the very sense without which the visual arts could not exist. No wonder Hollander's elaborate marshaling of images and ideas sometimes builds to conclusions that are airy or obvious or obscure. But as she weaves her way through the ages, this canny historian does get a reader's mind going. There were many times when Hollander's ideas were coming at me so fast that I had to put *Moving Pictures* down for a moment to collect my thoughts. That's a wonderful way to feel when you read a book.

Hollander's dozen pages on Turner are an example of the way *Moving Pictures* soars. She juggles two or three themes, keeps everything in the air, and reveals a familiar artist in an unfamiliar light. Hollander approaches Turner in a conventional historical manner, through her discussion of the English watercolorists of the early 19th century, Cotman, Girtin, and Cozens. When she remarks that Turner "seems to have extended the domain of watercolor to swallow up that of oil painting," she's on familiar ground. But in the next sentence she's off in her own direction, explaining that the work of Turner and these other watercolorists "has that engulfing effect also realized on the movie screen, where we are drawn in to participate without preparation, not urged to stand back and gaze in a state of schooled understanding. The thin air surrounds us, conveyed in screens of paint that seem to float by themselves."

From there she shifts to the history of taste: the theory of the picturesque and the sublime that had a great influence on Turner. For Hollander, the sublime in 19th-century painting foreshadows the sublime in movies. She mentions Antonioni's *L'Avventura*, where "the look of barren hills and houses, illustrating a personal doubt-ridden search for retrieval, continuity, and comprehension, manages to place the viewer at the mercy of the hero's anxiety." And you get a connection to Turner's paintings, where the distinctive physiognomy of the landscape sometimes suggests the emotional state of his tiny figures. In Turner, "as in movies, . . . our eye is made to confront what is perpetually escaping, the natural whirl and lurch of the local phenomena that surround the subjective consciousness at intense moments."

This suggestion—quintessential Hollander in its effort to make the abstract palpable—carries us into a discussion of some of the strangest of all Turner's work, his misted-over paintings of figures in interiors. By applying her idea of "subjective consciousness" to interiors that at first look maddeningly vague, Hollander achieves one of those clicks of insight that make her book so engaging. She gives Turner's watery atmosphere an emotional rationale. These odd paintings "echo the scanning gaze and receptive consciousness and ready emotion required of the modern romantic moviegoer." It's an insight into older art that I imagine one couldn't have achieved without recourse to the movies. And the unconventionality of Hollander's viewpoint makes the unconventionality of those Turners more convincing.

While Hollander proceeds in a generally linear manner, from the beginnings of the Renaissance to the mid-20th century, her discoveries don't so much grow out of a study of history as they exist in a modern consciousness that has been interjected, retroactively, into history. (This is why her book leaves one with so many questions about cause and effect.) She ends up with a view of postmedieval art that diverges dramatically from the traditional readings of the European high art tradition. (Those older histories moved, broadly speaking, from Renaissance Rome and Venice to 19th-century Paris.) In the anti-canonical drift of her taste, and in her tendency to set artists and works of art in a somewhat overly constricting network of social and psychological pressures, Hollander is very much an art historian of the 1980s.

Moving Pictures posits an eternal present where printmaking, with its close ties to a popular audience, mirrors the cinematic sensibility. "Graphic art," Hollander argues, "because it is both 'reproductive' and 'creative' and may copy or fake as easily as invent, . . . is situated at a crossroads, a meeting place for the most refined and the crudest aims. It is the largely unacknowledged brothel of art, to which high thought, low feeling, and commercial interest all resort, to make use of the same commodities on an equal footing." Hollander tends to discuss printmakers and moviemakers in the same breath. "The old reproductive graphic arts were the means of moving the fine arts into the world, of getting them to do their broader cultural and

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emotional work, and the camera soon came to do the same job." She focuses on Northern Europe, where some of the greatest painters were also great printmakers—and thus, by her logic, proto-filmmakers. It would seem that the necessity of keeping high art high was not felt so much in the North as it was in the South. Or was it that high art was better integrated in the South, where Greco-Romanism was a living idea and art-conscious Catholicism an everyday reality? If you follow Hollander's logic too closely, you may reach the weird conclusion that movies are a product of the Protestant North.

Hollander's view of movies as a paradigmatic art form can sound up-to-the-minute; but it can also, oddly enough, feel a little recherché. I think this is because her approach brings to mind attitudes prevalent during the heyday of art films in the 1960s and early 1970s. (That might be when Hollander first fell in love with movies.) When she insists on our seeing movies as Art with a capital A, she recalls the people who used to make a religion of Fellini and Resnais. (Do they still exist?) And when she writes about Hollywood, it's with a desire to elevate the good old Hollywood amusements: she wants to ennoble popular art, which was something the revival houses, with their elaborate program notes, could do, too.

Toward the beginning of *Moving Pictures*, Hollander remarks that "everyone knows that bad movies can be thrilling and have an appeal beyond their defects. This is usually because of the visual thrill built into the medium, the light-borne picture that transcends bad acting, bad writing, and bad editing." That may be what the old art house audiences believed, but I'm not sure how well it describes what actually happens when we go to the movies. Movies are the archetypal impure art form: a mix of star presence, drama, music, beautiful images, action, and travelogue. What we often go for is the simple pleasure of watching a terrific performer. There are many memorable movies in which the "visual thrill built into the medium" is negligible or nonexistent.

Hollander's habit of discussing films in lofty terms can grate on a reader's nerves. She presses the cinematic metaphor too hard. You don't know quite what she's out to prove: Are paintings telling us about movies or vice versa? When she defines this cinematic type of painting as dramatic and illustrative, and opposes it to a type of painting that is narrative and theatrical—well, the points drift in and out of focus. I get the general idea when she insists on putting Caravaggio in the non-cinematic category (it has something to do with his being theatrical, which Hollander defines as "static like an emblem or an epiphany"); but the argument seems forced. And I couldn't help but wonder why, except in order to preserve her North/South dichotomy, she left out of her discussion the whole phenomenon of fresco cycles, such as Giotto's Arena Chapel. Surely such cycles foreshadow the cinematic idea of a person's growth and evolution through time. For Hollander, cinematic art isn't composed in terms of a classical language of gesture, which is the case with Giotto. But maybe there are a number of different kinds of proto-cinematic art; some of Anna Magnani's body language recalls the exaggerated movements in Italian Baroque painting.

The continuous comparisons to the movies (at times they seem to be tacked on to the end of every paragraph) get to be like nervous tics. Thus Callot's prints "have a De Mille-like combination of huge scope and small incident"; and Jan Steen's action "is comic and a bit pointed, as in old Technicolor comedies with Doris Day." These analogies sound interesting in isolation, but there are too many comparisons that are too similar. Somewhere toward the middle of the book you begin to hope you'll never hear Woody Allen's name mentioned again (but it is, it is).

Moving Pictures may be better for dipping into than reading end to end. (That's probably how most people will read it, anyway.) In small doses Hollander's daring isn't so often sunk by her doggedness, and her method yields extraordinary things. There are engaging passages on many artists. Hollander points to the little child in a painting by De Hooch, who "focuses the image upon floating consciousness, rather than upon controlled events." That brings you to the center of De Hooch's magical world of men and women who share a glass of beer in tiny, sun-splashed gardens. She observes that Watteau's art suggests "the cinematization of leisure, the view of life as a continuous flow of suggestive, overlapping costumed scenes, in which no vulgar confrontation or denouements disturb the sense of endless possibility."

And she's especially good on Friedrich, whose "settings are prepared for the presence of plain characters, persons, or a person, not for that of a painter or a poet—for us, in fact, as direct participants in an emotional sequence." When she moves from Friedrich to the "classic movie-scenery—pertinent settings for cinematic drama, not beautiful locales photographed for their own sake," the analogy locks right into place. In some of the late chapters on the 19th century—when movies are already, so to speak, in the wings—the argument flows easily. In a couple of sentences, Hollander offers what others would think is enough to fill an article.

If Hollander is an anti-formalist with regard to painting, she remains a formalist with regard to film. This is the big paradox of her book, and it's never resolved. A child of the art houses, Hollander sees movies as an elevated art form. By considering movies more or less in isolation from contemporary popular experience, she overintellectualizes the nature of moviegoing. "The greatest secret in the engulfing effect of modern cinema," Hollander observes, "is the projection of the film image so that light pours through it onto a screen, and cancels other sources of illumination." This rings true; but when she sees that "engulfing" experience as connected to the work of certain "painters of the past"—most likely a Vermeer or a Rembrandt, who give us the sense of a completed world—well, with that connection she's pushing her argument to the breaking point.

What Hollander describes as the engulfing character of the movies has everything to do with the passivity of the moviegoer, with our sense that we let a movie happen to us. That can't ever be the case with a painting. The stillness of a painting—of all paintings—puts us in the active position: *we* have to make the scene move, to read it, to compose it. Yet the question of audience response is one that Hollander doesn't ever come to grips with. Too often she writes as if being engulfed by a painting and by a movie are the same thing. And perhaps for this reason many people in the art world are going to like Hollander's approach. We're in a period when paintings are experienced passively, as a form of popular entertainment: paintings with big, generalized effects—paintings that don't compose—are what gets pushed to the forefront. Though it isn't Hollander's intent, *Moving Pictures* could give intellectual credibility to a widespread belief that art galleries are now upscale movie theaters—picture palaces without popcorn.

After a day of going to New York art galleries, where there's scarcely an audience to be found and I'm engaged in a basically solitary experience, I often slip into the latest offering at the neighborhood Loews Sixplex. I'm struck by the radical difference in how I respond to these art forms I love. Suddenly I'm surrounded by high school kids and Upper

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Westsiders out on dates. Much of the fun of moviegoing has to do with being a part of an audience, with the leveling effect of the experience. When we drop into the dark cocoon of the movie theater, we lose ourselves in the big, heterogeneous group—and that's exhilarating, provocative, sexy. Looking at paintings is very different. It's about sharpening your own perceptions as you stand in the clear light of day.

Obviously a lot of the current crop of big-name artists are moviegoers; sometimes it seems that movie culture is the only kind of visual culture that any of them know or care about. Recently, when David Salle was asked if he did much reading when he first came to New York in the mid-1970s, he ended up talking about movies. "I thought of Douglas Sirk [the Hollywood director of the late '40s and '50s] as a very great tragedian. I remember seeing *Imitation of Life* at the Museum of Modern Art with Sherrie Levine. We used to go to the movies together. I remember saying to her afterward that I really despaired of ever being able to make anything this great, a work of art anywhere near as great as that film."

The size and the internal scale of many of the paintings of David Salle and Julian Schnabel, as well as their collage-like configurations, are meant to hit us in the way today's big-budget movies hit us: they're broad, they're clever, they go Boom! Erich Fischl, the only one of the current American painters that Hollander mentions, juxtaposes near and far objects in a vague, overly dramatized manner that can work on us in the movies, but looks stilted in paint on canvas. I don't want to give the impression that Hollander intends to glorify SoHo's mimicking of Hollywood. In fact she's deftly critical of Fischl, and concludes her discussion by observing that his paintings seem not so much to recall film as "the cruder realistic romanticism of television."

If the cinemascope-scale ambitions of the generation that came of age in SoHo at the beginning of the 1980s have taught us anything, it's that our love affair with movies can't be easily transferred to the easel. (The use of oversized photographic prints as an intermediary between painting and movies—as in the work of Cindy Sherman—creates a mix of highbrow and lowbrow in which everything cancels out.) This isn't to say that movies—the most exciting visual art form of the late 20th century—don't have broad artistic ramifications. Movie imagery and movie magic can provide structures and iconographies for artists. Examples that are particularly memorable for me are some paintings that Robert Delaunay did early in the century of a cinematic close-up of a couple pressed together in a kiss; and the repeated images, like a sequence of film frames, in certain still lifes by Léger (who had at one point thought of giving up painting for moviemaking). Hollander would spread the net wider, to Edward Hopper and Fairfield Porter. Of course, all these artists lead us away from the movies as much as they lead us toward them. And there's the rub. Each art form, as it becomes more truly itself, follows its own internal logic.

The downside of the brilliant eclecticism of *Moving Pictures* is Hollander's tendency to see equivalencies between too many different experiences. Readers can get a sense of this even before they settle down with the book. Some of the pairs of illustrations are elegant miniaturized essays in postmodern aesthetics. Toward the beginning, a lithograph by Manet is juxtaposed with another inkily black image, which turns out to be a sketch for a scene in *Gone with the Wind*. In both cases, Hollander observes, "The pictorial method consists mainly of massing figures and objects both near and far in deep back-opening space, and rendering them in patches of light and shade for maximum emotional and kinetic effect." Later on, Vermeer's *Officer and Laughing Girl* from the Frick is set below a still from *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, with Bette Davis sitting behind a table in a railroad car. "The resemblance," Hollander explains, "may be understood neither as a coincidence nor as a conscious imitation, but as an example of cultural continuity." I'm ambivalent about these pairings. Too often Hollander puts the pleasure that she gets from making farfetched connections above the pleasure of the work itself. She works herself into corners. "Cultural continuity" is an awfully fancy way to describe the fact that pictures of men and women sitting across tables from one another have existed for the past 300 years.

And yet the fun that Hollander is having is infectious. She manages to carry us with her over some of the bumpier areas of her argument. Those who believe that what is most important in an art form is what is unique to that art form will have problems with *Moving Pictures*. But even as Hollander is exploding the boundaries that ought to separate painting from moviemaking, she's steering us toward the heart of the matter.

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Just Deserts

BY RICHARD JENKYNS

T. E. Lawrence: The Selected Letters edited by Malcolm Brown

(W. W. Norton, 568 pp., $27.50)

Lawrence of Arabia was an American invention, or so Lawrence himself liked to imply. It was the fault of that journalist Lowell Thomas: he had been in Cairo during the Great War snuffling around for a story, spent ten days in Arabia, misunderstood half of what he heard, exaggerated the rest, and fabricated a legend. *With Lawrence in Arabia* and *The Boys' Life of Colonel Lawrence* made Thomas successful and his hero world famous. "What have I done to deserve Lowell Thomas?" Lawrence complained, nursing his self-disgust; and when a lady in an Aberdeen shop offered him a copy of *Boys' Life* at a reduced rate, he told her that he knew the subject of the book, and he was a washout.

But *Boys' Life* is a wonderfully gripping read. I can still remember the excitement of finding it, at the age of about nine, in a forgotten bookcase down a dark corridor in my grandmother's house: the tale of young Ned who freed a country, helped with the greatest war in human history, and made two of his friends kings, all before he was 30. (Best of all, he blew up lots of trains.) Historians will rank him among the most remarkable men that ever lived (so the book concludes), along with Leif the Lucky, Marco Polo, and Sir Francis Drake.

A marvelous story. But is it true? Well, up to a point, Mr. Thomas. The picture given by Malcolm Brown in this admirably edited selection of letters seems persuasive. Lawrence carried out a tricky and important task with skill and courage. His job was to get the Bedouin to fit

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in with General Allenby's overall strategy for the conquest of the Middle East, and to harry the Turks in the Hijaz. This was a difficult job, requiring great reserves of courage, diplomacy, and tactical skill, and Lawrence seems to have carried it out consummately well. Without making romantic flourishes about swaying the destinies of nations, we can still see this as a significant contribution to Allenby's victory.

And though Lawrence came to feel that he had failed the Arabs, it is arguable that his prestige and his lobbying of the powerful in the immediate aftermath of the war influenced the peace settlement. The austere and high-thinking Faisal, whom Lawrence had picked out as the best of the Arab princes, the pattern of all that Englishmen expect an Arab to be, got the big prize, the throne of Iraq; his brother Abdullah, fatter, jollier, and more circumspect, had to be content with Transjordan.

As for Lawrence himself, the war changed his life. That may seem the flattest truism, but it is in reality true of rather few people. Most of those who have been to war in our century must surely have come back with their experience enlarged. But though they may have been left with memories to enrich or torment them forever, they have usually slipped back into the previous current of their existence. With Lawrence it was quite otherwise. The romantic idea of him, launched upon the world by Thomas, as an Irish lad born on a wild Welsh shore and predestined to a life of action is in some respects almost comically remote from the reality (and as a matter of fact, Lawrence disliked being called an Irishman). Once we look at his background and upbringing, a different picture emerges: but for a twist of fortune, he seemed headed for the life of a writer and scholar.

He grew up in Oxford, in Polstead Road, one of those comfortably gloomy North Oxford Streets of big red fuscous villas, where it seems always to be autumn, with rain coming on. The atmosphere was one of low-church piety, with dutiful attendance upon Canon Christopher's evangelical sermons at St. Aldate's, where Lawrence was a member of the Church Lads' Brigade. When one of his brothers grew up to be a medical missionary, his mother accompanied him to China and spent many years there.

There was, it is true, a skeleton in the cupboard. Lawrence's father's real name was Chapman. He had been an Anglo-Irish gentleman, the heir to a baronetcy and married to a reputedly sour wife who had borne him four daughters, when he fell in love with a governess 15 years his junior. His wife would not divorce him, and so throwing up his home and station for love, he left Ireland to start a new and more middle-class existence on the other side of the sea. It is rather a romantic story, and perhaps it is significant that when Lawrence learned of it, he did not find it so. The stain of bastardy was of course much uglier in the 1920s than it is today, and it must always be a shock to find that you and your parents are not quite what you supposed.

Yet Lawrence's reaction seems excessive. When he changed his name to Shaw, he saw it as a temporary measure before ultimately becoming Chapman. Then why not be Chapman straight-away? He seems to want to linger over the affair, to make a fuss about it. Lawrence of Arabia's roots were in the bourgeois solidity of North Oxford, and he was disturbed to find them shallower than he had imagined.

From his letters the young Lawrence appears delightful, a paragon of Edwardian youth: *mens sana in corpore sano*—or at least it would seem. We find him bicycling around France in his teens, covering huge distances even in the mountains of the south, delighting in landscape and cathedrals alike. His undergraduate career at Oxford, at Jesus College, culminated in a first class degree in history. As a contribution to this he had spent a summer in the mountains of Lebanon and Syria, studying the crusader castles for a thesis in which he sought to overthrow the conventional view about the relation between these buildings and the innovations in military architecture found in western Europe at about the same time. As both a physical and an intellectual adventure, this was extraordinarily enterprising for a man of 20. During the next few years he excavated at Carchemish in Syria under the direction of the archaeologist D. G. Hogarth and contemplated starting a private press with a couple of friends.

DRAWING BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Then came the war, and because of his experience of the Middle East he was posted to Egypt. For two years he was kept hanging about in Cairo, bored and underemployed. While two of his brothers died on the western front, he sat behind a desk, editing a magazine and planning the production of postage stamps. Eventually, in October 1916, his superiors sent him into Arabia with Ronald Storrs to assess the usefulness of Abdullah. When Storrs went back to Egypt, Lawrence stayed on, and the rest, as they say, is history.

But history could so easily have been different. Lawrence could well have returned to England after one of the dullest wars on record, and slipped into the life of don, archaeologist, or minor litterateur. Though he adored Charles Doughty's *Arabia Deserta*, he was not himself by temperament a traveler, explorer,

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The Lives of Lawrence

In a film about T. E. Lawrence, his activities have to loom very large. There is a temptation to mislead by giving the impression that they were much more important and central than they could possibly have been. To this temptation Lawrence and his admirers were at all costs determined to succumb, and *Lawrence of Arabia*, David Lean's film of 1962 now restored to its full length (the producers had originally cut about 20 minutes), faithfully follows in their footsteps.

Historically speaking, Lawrence's activities in the Hijaz and east of the Jordan during the last two years of the First World War, which made him universally known as Lawrence of Arabia, were a sideshow of a sideshow. Fighting the Ottomans in the Levant could in no way decide the outcome of the war, which would be won or lost on the western front. And in the Levant itself, the war against the Ottomans could not be won or even appreciably influenced by the occupation of 'Aqaba—strategically worthless and tactically insignificant—or by blowing up trains on the Hijaz railway.

In many ways Robert Bolt in his script, like Terence Rattigan in his play *Ross*, fell captive to Lawrence's version of history. As portrayed here, Lawrence is the sardonic outsider who, amateur as he is, with his superior intelligence, puts to shame his military superiors who appear as stupid and unimaginative bumblers, insufferably hidebound and complacent. There is an unsustainable paradox in such a view. Lawrence began the war as a lieutenant, a junior officer. That he ended it with the rank of colonel could not have been entirely his own achievement, for without the organization, the weapons, and generally the support that the army afforded him, Lawrence would have been able to accomplish little. Yet here is the great outsider, as he portrays himself and as the film portrays him, making fun of what made his achievement possible, subverting what catapulted him to fame.

In adopting Lawrence's way of looking at his adventure, the film helps to spread the romantic estimate of the guerrilla or the freebooter as militarily more efficient than, and somehow also morally superior to, the soldier who fights as the member of a unit organized hierarchically. The usual formula judged necessary for a box-office success may have made this rendition of Lawrence's wartime adventures seem mandatory, but it need not be accepted that the only way to succeed is to follow a formula, even though the formula is precisely that which Lawrence himself offers in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. To use a term that is now current, *Seven Pillars* is in many ways faction, and in following its lead *Lawrence of Arabia* becomes faction born out of faction.

To have made a film about T. E. Lawrence adequate to the historical record would have required abandoning *Seven Pillars* and making an attempt to convey, in a manner both true and adequate to the known record, what demons drove this man, and what the situation was in which circumstances afforded him the opportunity so spectacularly to intervene. This leads to the second major shortcoming: that as shown here the Arab protagonists, and the Sharif Faisal above all, are very far removed from the actual historical characters.

Faisal is portrayed in the film as a mature and worldly-wise political leader, free of all illusions, a statesman in stature, intellectually and morally superior to those British officials who were trying to manipulate and exploit the Arab movement of which he was the devoted leader. The truth, however, is that Faisal was young, not mature, inexperienced, not wise. He was insecure in his position among suspicious tribal leaders greedy for gold, which only the British could supply; jealous of his elder brother Abdullah; and resentful of his autocratic father, Hussein Ibn Ali, the Emir of Mecca.

For his own purposes Lawrence portrayed Faisal as a transcendent hero and paladin, wronged by greedy imperialists. But there is no reason why the makers of the film should have accepted this legend. How much more riveting would have been an attempt to show the relation between these two flawed characters as they were in reality: Lawrence driven by his demons and Faisal content to be carried along, as he thought, to fame and power. Instead, Faisal, along with the other Arab and British characters, emerge as more cardboard figures, their dealings with one another devoid of all dramatic tension.

The climax of *Lawrence of Arabia*, as of *Seven Pillars*, is the Arab occupation of Damascus. On the whole the script again follows Lawrence's version, but with a twist of its own. Damascus is shown as having been conquered by Faisal's followers. How much more dramatically effective it would have been to show the British general Allenby as a deus ex machina forbidding his troops to enter Damascus so that Faisal might claim its capture. Not only dramatically effective, in pointing up the character and the situation of the British and the Arab protagonists, but also in conformity to the truth that Lawrence strove, very successfully, to disguise. But Bolt's script shows Allenby in Damascus following its occupation by the Arabs actually delaying the intervention of his troops to restore order, so that the Arabs should learn how incapable they were of running their own affairs. There is no truth in such an allegation. Its point, one assumes, is to show the arrogant imperialist teaching the native a lesson.

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or lover of the exotic; despite his war experiences, he remained oddly indifferent to much of Arab culture, dismissing the Koran as a "mixture of Bradshaw and major prophet and police news." He might have remained a familiar figure in North Oxford as late as the 1970s, a small, wiry figure pottering down Polstead Road on his way to the newsagent.

In the event, the rest of his life, between the end of the war and his death in a road accident at the age of 46, was to be utterly different. For a year or two he kept up his spirits. He might be often angry or ill at ease, but he remained active and vigorous, absorbed in the great game of fighting for a just settlement for the Arabs as the victorious allies carved up the Ottoman Empire. Oxford beckoned again, and he accepted a fellowship for two years at All Souls College.

Then came some sort of mental or moral collapse. With the permission of Trenchard, the head of the Royal Air Force, he enlisted in the ranks, under an assumed name. When his cover was blown, he was thrown out, joined the army as a private, hated it, and after much pleading was allowed back into the RAF. But this brought no happiness. He turned into a sort of recluse: posted to a camp in India (in an area that is now part of Pakistan), he never bothered to travel the few miles that would take him into the city of Karachi, and his letters were full of anguish. This part of his story is familiar enough (it was the subject of Terence Rattigan's play *Ross*), but so strange that it prompts one to ask whether the cause of his misery was the war or some older sickness of spirit.

"I'm so funnily made up, sexually," Lawrence wrote to E. M. Forster. This side of him has been the subject of much speculation. It might seem prying or prurient to consider it, did it not appear that Lawrence himself wished us to. Brown believes that the evidence of his letters counts strongly against the supposition that he was homosexual; I doubt that. He told Forster that he had never had sexual relations with anybody, and could not imagine himself doing so, and we must accept this testimony unless, like his most violent detractors, we suppose him to be a liar; but that does not settle the question.

Consider the evidence. There is no trace in the correspondence of any emotional attachment to a woman. (In a footnote Brown claims that he once proposed marriage to a family friend who later became engaged to one of his brothers; I do not know what we are to make of that.) By contrast there were strong feelings for young men, first for the Arab boy Dahoum, whom he brought to Oxford shortly before the First World War; the notorious dedication of the *Seven Pillars* to the mysterious composite figure "S.A." is in part at least a tribute to his memory. Later there is Aircraftman Guy, who can have had little in common with Lawrence socially or intellectually, addressed as "Poppet" and "My rabbit."

It looks likely that Forster, who sent him copies of some homosexual writings that he suppressed in his lifetime, thought he recognized a kindred spirit. There is an intriguing letter in which Lawrence writes to Forster about Lowes Dickinson, Norman Douglas, and J. R. Ackerley—homosexuals all. One has the sense of freemasonry. And Lawrence was at least interested in the subject; he is on to the theme of homosexuality as early as the second page of the *Seven Pillars*, defending its practice among his Arabs. None of this is conclusive, but it all points the same way.

Which leads to the further question: How deeply was he damaged by the night at Deraa when he was captured and tortured by the Turks? This incident is well known from a strange chapter of the *Seven Pillars*, as well as from David Lean's film. Lawrence's own account, like much in his book, is strangely lucid and opaque at the same time, both austere and overdramatic: "The citadel of my integrity was irrevocably destroyed." What does he want us to understand by that? The book seems to imply that he managed to escape the Turkish commander's pederastic lusts; later, though, he told Forster that he had been forcibly sodomized.

Some people have found his reaction to the events of Deraa theatrical, ringing not quite true; it has even been suggested that he made the whole thing up. But it is at least possible that we are witnesses here to a terrible tragedy: a trauma that wrecked the rest of his life. When we look back to the young Lawrence, so eager and alert to his impressions of the outside world, and contrast him with the inward-looking, self-obsessed recluse that he was to become, we may well feel that something more than revulsion against fame or a sense of having failed the Arabs was needed to bring about so woeful a transformation.

Of course, the truth can never be known for sure, but certainly he saw his life in the ranks as a purification. Since Deraa, he said, he had gone about whimpering, Unclean, Unclean. The air force would be purgative: "I have to answer here only for my cleanness of skin, cleanness of clothes, and a certain mechanical neatness of physical evolution upon the barrack square." But like the mystic, he seems to have felt that the way up and the way down are one and the same: he would be made pure by plunging himself in the mire. Half the time he was praising the RAF for "the one great merit of showing me humanity very clear and clean"; half the time he dwelled on the animalism, the "cat-calling carnality" of barrack life. He spoke of "obedience, nescience," of the "burning out of . . . self-respect" from his nature: "From henceforward my way will lie with these fellows here, degrading myself . . . in the hope that some day I will really feel degraded, be degraded to their level."

He wanted to sink himself into the common ruck of humanity, yet at the same time to withdraw into a citadel, aloof from the thoughts and desires of ordinary men. Carnal, carnal—it is a leitmotiv in some of these letters, and at moments he felt that all existence was a kind of carnality: "the basis of life, the raison d'être of us, the springs of our actions, our ideals, ambitions, hopes are carnal as our lust." What hope then could there be, other than a

Big Language

In every sense of every word I'd roam
Past each streetlight waiting out each sunset,
And walk the dark consent inside me home.

Behind my back, clouds rolled away like foam,
And school became a thought, and every thought
In every sense of every word would roam.

And every syllable became a schoolroom,
And every feeling, one big happy thought
Walking my dark consent inside me home,

Past the country club where parents swam
Or soaked in those sunny days their money bought.
In every sense of their every word I'd roam

Till their laughter lifted far above their kingdom,
Gone just like smoke beneath the sun that set,
Leaving my dark consent without a home—

For I was just a cloud above their kingdom.
Big language stuttered one more idiot,
Who every sense of every word would roam
Until he made his dark consent his home.

William Olsen

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total self-abnegation?

Brown concedes that the later letters can become tedious, especially Lawrence's disparagement of his own *Seven Pillars*. Here one does sense an insincerity; the self-denigration seems a way of wheedling praise out of his correspondents. When his old friend Vyvyan Richards offered him some useful and rather telling criticisms of the book, he was at once indignantly defensive. But all of this reveals a rather surprising continuity between the younger and the older self: the passionate desire for literary success.

He told David Garnett, "I am not a man of action. I only filled the place of one, because none was available. I'm much better at writing than at soldiering." It is extraordinary that he should give to Trenchard as his reason for entering the ranks of the RAF the wish to write about it, even more extraordinary (and a tribute to Lawrence's personal magnetism) that Trenchard should have accepted a recruit so oddly motivated. Lawrence admitted that he was "an incorrigible phraser" and noted his "tendency to do up small packets of words foppishly."

It is not greatly surprising to find that he was an admirer of Walter Pater; in life he was spartan, but on the printed page a dandy. His is not the straightforward, workmanlike English that we find, for instance, in the greatest explorer-writer of our own time, Wilfrid Thesiger; more similar is Patrick Leigh-Fermor, in whom, however, the combination of wiry life and florid prose is very engaging. Leigh-Fermor's purple passages do not destroy his native ebullience, whereas the sentences of *Seven Pillars* have been so reworked and polished that the charm and spontaneity have been rubbed off them.

Yet charm Lawrence must certainly have had, even if it appears only fitfully in his letters. He cannot be wholly acquitted of enjoying acquaintance with the great. There is a revealing slip in a letter written after the death of his mentor Hogarth: "If G.B.S. and Forster go, I'll have no writing friends left, anywhere." Actually, it was Mrs. Shaw, not Shaw himself, who corresponded with him, but her devotion is forgotten in favor of the famous name. But the fact remains, as these letters bear witness, that most of those who knew Lawrence liked him and some loved him. He impressed almost everyone he met, including people who would have had little time, one imagines, for a humbug or poseur. An admirer recalled seeing him at the Versailles conference in Arab dress: "From amid the flowing draperies his noble features, his perfectly chiselled lips and flashing eyes loaded with fire and comprehension shone forth. He looked what he was, one of Nature's greatest princes." Who wrote this? A middle-aged lady novelist with a photograph of Valentino by her bedside? No, Winston Churchill.

RICHARD JENKYNS is the author of *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Harvard University Press).

The Stand-Up Critic

BY JAMES WOLCOTT

Mudrick Transcribed: Classes and Talks by Marvin Mudrick edited by Lance Kaplan

(c/o College of Creative Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara, 409 pp., $20)

Marvin Mudpie, we called him at *Harper's*. (This was 1981-83, when Michael Kinsley was the editor.) His banzai cry riffling the back pages of the *Hudson Review*, where he wrote about books regularly for over 30 years, Marvin Mudrick didn't curtsy before the niceties of criticism. He was a mudslinger. Hardly anyone high or low escaped his spatter. Shakespeare was a woman-loathing lord high executioner swanking his carnage in purple plumage, the dear Samuel Pepys of the diaries was a "churchy jerkoff and mad secret fucker," John Cheever was an aging funkster veiling "past, present, and future in a fine gray spittle of arbitrary disillusion." John Gardner was a postnasal drip, Philip Roth an unstrung poseur ("Poor Roth has lost not only his bearings but his marbles"), structuralism a conehead con job, led by that "inept wizard" Lacan. Even when Mudrick elevated a writer, he leveled the supporting cast, lopping off heads if need be. Saluting Edmund Wilson as sturdy sentinel on literature and seminal ideas, for example, Mudrick made him appear to have been the only sane man standing in the 1940s and 1950s. "Pound had since gone round the bend," he writes, "Trilling sounded like T. S. Eliot after shock treatments," and "Leavis seemed—well, a mite touchy . . . " Magisterial understatement, that!

And applicable not only to F. R. Leavis. Marvin Mudrick also was—well, a mite touchy. He regarded editing from the perspective of Poe's prisoner in "The Pit and the Pendulum." At the mere mention of cuts in his copy, he saw a hissing blade bearing down upon him, slicing air, paper, skin. About editing he was what Malcolm Muggeridge once called a minimomaniac. With angry pinpoint recall he could detail every punctuation change, altered title, transposed sentence, dropped paragraph, and rejected manuscript perpetrated in the pit over the last 30 years.

His testiness didn't stop at the margins. In argument he could go from zero to boiling in seconds, his spectacles filming with steam. He seemed to go out of his way to add a stitch or two to his hurt feelings. He would come to New York, neglect to tell anyone at which hotel he was staying, then later complain that no one bothered to call him. He was one of criticism's rare hard-core impossibles. And yet—there was more to his criticism than abuse, more to his personality than baby squalls shot with paranoia. Products of close reading and open response, the best pieces in his review collections—*On Culture and Literature*, *The Man in the Machine*, and *Books Are Not Life But Then What Is?*—have a humor, gallop, and hunger for elation virtually absent from criticism today. (Absent as well from Mudrick's last collection, *Nobody Here But Us Chickens*, where he let his bad temper over Shakespeare get the best of him, though there is a hilarious putdown of Hamlet called "The Unstrung Zero.") "Criticism talks, fiction dramatizes," Mudrick declared, and if he read with a razor's edge, he wrote as if he were talking off the top of his head. He turned litcrit into a spinoff of stand-up comedy. An erudite spiel.

Mudrick Transcribed documents what a blast-off artist Marvin Mudrick could be. Edited by Lance Kaplan, the book preserves from tapes classes and talks given by Mudrick at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where he taught literature and was the founder of its College of Creative Studies. As major mover at the College of Creative Studies, Mudrick was, no surprise, controversial. To some outsiders he was worse than a mischief-maker—he was a

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horned warlock seducing his students into infidel error. (One onlooker claimed he indoctrinated his students into believing that the only novelists worth reading were Lady Murasaki and Jane Austen.)

But if Mudrick was a warlock, he couldn't have collected a more industrious or supportive cabal. A former student of Mudrick's, Kaplan supervised the transcribing, proofreading, and typesetting of these taped sessions (his preface lists students and former students who assisted in the grunt work), eye-squinting drudgery done out of abiding admiration. Full of go, *Mudrick Transcribed* charges along with unchecked enthusiasm, unafraid of the bumps and blind curves of fast discourse. The impromptu reactions of Mudrick and his students aren't always tidy or apropos, but they have a torn-free adrenaline. As Mudrick himself once wrote, "Such impudence! it's like being alive."

Raised in an Orthodox Jewish family of Russian extraction, Mudrick began early as a bookworm. Even as a child he was in the throes of thick books with pee-wee print. "When I was a kid, when I was seven years old, I could remember going to the library and looking with positive *lust* at big fat books [*laughter*] which would *last* me." "I mean, the weekly walk to the library—infinite riches in a little room—unbelievable." Reading for him wasn't a passive pastime but a passionate escape. "Because reading was great fun, it was extremely entertaining. It's true that Nobody Loved Me [*laughter*] . . . I was All Alone . . . I was very unsocial, and so I read."

As a teacher he expects his students to read too. "Why in the world else would you be a lit major?" So for the first week's assignment in his class on Eighteenth-Century English Prose, he assigns Boswell's *Life of Johnson*. A lost cause, because he knows that for his students reading isn't a lust that lasts:

> [I]f you say to me, Do you seriously expect all of us to read the *Life of Johnson* by next Tuesday? Of course I don't. Most of you are phonies anyway as far as literature is concerned. You've never even read a Shakespeare *play* which has been assigned to you in one week, and that you should be able to read in an hour and a half. *I* know all that, and if you think I'm going to act as a kind of a policeman over you, you really *are* out of your mind.

Mudrick insists that his students swim the torrent and swallow foam even if much of what they read is over their heads. "The worst thing that's done in these classes that you take is that the pretense is that you're going to understand everything you read. If you understood everything you read, you don't belong in school, you belong in heaven."

To read is to plunder. "You take a class like this because you get a chance to plunge into some of the juiciest material in the world in books. The 18th century, I have come to be more and more convinced, is the most important century in human history. Everything comes to an end there, and everything has a beginning." For Mudrick the 18th century was pivotal not because of abstract historical forces but because of the fascinating *people*. "I'm inclined to think that probably there were more individual great men in the 18th century than in any other century."

Sociable men, they didn't hole up in their studies. "It is an amazing age, in the sense that you get the impression that practically anybody in it could talk to anybody else, however different their opinions were—and there was a *very* wide range and diversity of opinion. And the person who is the catalyst, the go-between, the facilitator, and the accommodater, is Boswell!" Rousseau, Voltaire, Hume, Gibbon, Burke—Johnson's biographer pestered them all, provoking them in drawing rooms, taverns, even on their deathbeds, writing between his whoring the truest account of camaraderie ever committed.

Mudrick has no truck with the stale conceit that Boswell was simply a silly bugger, Bertie Wooster to Johnson's Jeeves. Using Boswell's account of an impromptu debate at the Literary Club over emigration, Mudrick demonstrates that Boswell was literature's ace transcriber. Quoting Boswell's account of the parrying between Burke, Sheridan, and Johnson, he tells his students, "What's so astonishing to me about this—I'm sure you don't make much sense out of it, but consider the intellectual effort required to get down this stuff! I mean Boswell is sitting there, he doesn't know any shorthand, he's participating in a conversation himself—you can't really be writing this fast."

And he isn't putting words into anyone's mouth either. "He is not inventing their arguments—he *couldn't* invent their arguments." It's a remarkable, perhaps unrepeatable feat. "I don't think it's ever been done before or since, certainly not reporting the conversation of such extraordinary and extraordinarily different men." What was so touching about Boswell was that he *knew* he was sifting through twilight. After an evening with Johnson and Goldsmith, he wrote in his journal, "I felt a completion of happiness. I just sat and hugged myself in my own mind." And not because he was a groupie among stars. "Words cannot describe our feelings. The finer parts are lost, as the down upon a plum; the radiance of light cannot be painted. . . . It was somehow like being in London in the last age."

It was with Samuel Johnson that Boswell found his big bass drum. "Boswell has his own greatness, but it's very different from Johnson's, and when you begin to read the journals of Boswell you realize how different this is. Boswell doesn't have the wit, he doesn't have the force, he doesn't have the economy of statement that Johnson has." Mudrick isn't blinded by that authority, however. One of the most iconoclastic sections in *Mudrick Transcribed* comes when Mudrick inspects Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, enthroned by English departments everywhere as Johnson's most enduring achievement. For Mudrick, it doesn't quite pass muster. Generous and frank as Johnson personally was, "the quality that Johnson displays . . . surprisingly and disconcertingly often in the *Lives of the Poets* is *not* compatible with generosity of spirit," Mudrick argues.

He takes as his text the Life of Pope. Compiling Johnson's little digs at Alexander Pope's vanity and affectations ("And here we're involved with the moral nature of two of the major figures

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in English literature, one of whom happens to be writing about the other—and writing uncharacteristically"), Mudrick reaches a hilarious climax with Johnson's pooh-poohing of the grotto Pope had built on his estate:

> Seems fairly harmless, doesn't it? Would you think there was anything wrong with making a grotto of that kind? . . . [Pope] went around and said, *You know, when I'm in my grotto I feel terrific, and if you'd come down with me to my grotto you'd feel terrific.* And Johnson says *Bullshit. A grotto is not a place where anybody feels terrific.* He's tried grottos. [*Laughter.*] You've seen one you've seen them all [*laughing*]. You hear the fucking stagecoaches rattling over [*laughter*]—it's like being in a tunnel under the airport!

Not that Mudrick sympathizes with Pope or his showy, self-perpetuating style, which he compares to a bicycle without a rider. He prefers Swift. "Swift gains in comparison because Swift is a real nut. It's funny how you can accept a real nut and a pervert and a jerk by comparison with somebody who pretends to be the Second Coming of Jesus Christ." Swift was a cussed man who never compromised. "He bullied and bluffed and browbeat everybody, and beat them all down." A man after Mudrick's own mud-pie heart.

Yet Mudrick didn't want to be considered completely "anti-." He found being cast in the role of curmudgeon a bore. "My next-door neighbor . . . greets me always by saying, 'Whom have you been attacking lately?' [*Laughter.*] I think he's being jolly, I think he thinks he's being jolly." All echo, a jolly man is one who laughs at his own lame jokes, an audience of one. Mudrick wanted to make others laugh. Hence the compliment he cherished most came from a young woman at the *Hudson Review* who told him, "You're the funniest writer I've ever read":

> I could live the rest of my life on that compliment. [Laughs.] I don't care whether it's true; I love it. That's what I *want* to be. If I had the choice, that's what I would be: the funniest writer you have ever read.

Except for maybe H. L. Mencken, what other literary critic would express such a hope? Since Matthew Arnold, critics have sought to be thought of as worthy, committed, subtly troubled . . . captains on the dark horizon. Not for Mudrick these frown lines etched in settling cement. He didn't care where he slammed the puck as long as he loosened some laughs.

Not all of *Mudrick Transcribed* finds him on such a rollicking roll. The sections in which he describes the purposes and workings of the College of Creative Studies are little more than departmental chat. The chapters in which his class on narrative prose dissects students' stories for freshness of approach and falseness are somewhat inbred too. It's a shame that there isn't more talk about contemporary writers, considering how many of them Mudrick had covered in the *Hudson Review*.

And one chapter points up a major limitation in Mudrick's maverick manner—his inability to accommodate any critical tack other than his own. In a talk titled "Litcrit: If You Haven't Tried It Don't Knock It," he says that the three great critics of the 20th century are Sir Donald Frances Tovey, B. H. Haggin, and Harold Rosenberg. "And some of you will be interested to note that none of them is a literary critic." (Though he does note that Rosenberg practiced litcrit part-time.) Leavis, Trilling, Eliot, Wilson, they all faded for him. Philip Rahv, Frederick Crews, V. S. Pritchett, R. P. Blackmur, Dwight MacDonald, Mary McCarthy, Allen Tate, Wilfrid Sheed, and Seymour Krim don't even make his roll call.

And how could Cyril Connolly's shining example have slipped his mind? Months earlier Mudrick had published a stunning tribute to Connolly in *Harper's*, extolling him as the best book reviewer on the block for nearly half a century. "What Connolly has more of than any other reviewer, and what (plus intelligence, wit, style, and a prodigious range of reading) a reviewer needs most, is the confidence of the moment." Mudrick too had the confidence of the moment, but in his college talks he resists attributing such confidence to anyone else. He felt compelled to act like the one beating heart in a roomful of department store dummies.

Yet if you're susceptible to Mudrick's wayward style, that solitary beat is inspiriting. I met Marvin Mudrick only once and found him wary, subdued. *Mudrick Transcribed* is Mudrick unsubdued. It shows the wild, expansive side of him we non-students never saw. Without a Boswell by his side, a tape-recorder proved the next best friend. It caught him on the fly, when he hadn't a care, when he was in a courting mood with literature, music, and love:

> . . . The excitement is so tremendous—I can remember, for instance, waiting for a performance by Toscanini of the *Eroica*, say, and not being able to stop *trembling* while waiting for it, I mean trembling with nervous excitement, with *pleasure*, with what I think can only be described as a kind of sexual pleasure, though it's not directly that. And if you're interested in having experiences which will last you for a lifetime in the arts, you've got to do your damnedest to find your way to that kind of experience. How you do it I do not know. If you don't do it you're wasting your time in the arts and the only thing that will ever happen is that you will have topics for cocktail party conversation and it won't be of any—forget it. If you don't have that experience, forget it. You're wasting your time.

JAMES WOLCOTT writes regularly for *Vanity Fair*. He is currently working on a novel.

CORRESPONDENCE *continued from page 4*

contribution to the purge of improper thinking from the Washington scene (Notebook, July 3). In searching out a "reporter or pundit [who] could most dramatically wring his or her hands over the prospect of a new ethics hyperconsciousness," you bravely challenge journalists whose work fails to meet your own relentlessly high standard. And what is that high standard? "Let's assume" that a particular errant work, or the people quoted within it, "are right," you helpfully guide us, "so what?" I confess my error. I had thought it mattered quite a bit. I had also been taught by journalists of greater experience than myself that it was proper to quote people whether you shared their view of the world or not. Have faith in your readers, I was misled, to form their own judgments. I am deeply grateful to THE NEW REPUBLIC for correcting my thinking on this point.

MICHAEL ORESKES
Washington, D.C.

Not A Matter Of Habit

To the editors:

Barbara Ehrenreich suggests that Catholic clerical leaders have involved themselves in pro-life activities "as a way of soothing those elements of the laity that have been offended by the reforms of Vatican II, represented by the English mass and nuns in mufti" ("Mothers Unite," July 10). Why is it so difficult for Ehrenreich to understand that religious leaders can be motivated by deeply held moral convictions? Why is it necessary to imply that moral choices are nothing more than attempts to gain political advantage with the faithful? No intelligent Catholic lay person, and no Catholic cleric, however dull he might be, would ever place matters like religious garb or the language of the liturgy on the same moral plane as protection of fetal life.

FRANCIS M. MCLAUGHLIN
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Down with Nannies

IS THERE NOT ONE CUSTODIAN OF the commonweal that is free of bribery, corruption, and other abuses of power? The IRS, surely. But no. After a year's investigation, a subcommittee of the House Government Operations Committee has been holding open hearings on the evidence of rampant malfeasance by senior officials of the very agency that exacts, partly by the instrument of fear, exemplary rectitude from citizens in making their tax returns. Bribery. Blackmail. Granting favors for proffered and received favors. In Los Angeles in 1985, for example, senior IRS officials apparently harassed an apparel company, while thwarting a tax investigation of its competitor, which later rewarded one of the officials with a comfortable job. And in Chicago in 1984, it seems, an assistant regional inspector traded confidential information to a company controlled by organized crime in return for theater tickets and free dinners. Around the country the bribery and kickbacks have inevitably spawned cover-ups; whistleblowers within the IRS have been transferred, dismissed, and (the highest irony) audited. *Quis custodiet* . . . ? The phrase is from one of Juvenal's *Satires*, questioning the wisdom of setting young guards over wives to prevent infidelities. It seems apt. If the IRS is found cheating, as has been asked, why should taxpayers not cheat?

IT IS NOT PARTISAN TO POINT out that the growth of these unscrupulous activities seems to have taken place during Reagan's administration. In the HUD scandal, as layer upon layer of devilry is disclosed, all leading to Republican appointees and to the very roots of the party, one's heart sinks. It is not only the glaring violations of the federal code that forbids the use of "public office or official title for private gain," but the contemptuous inability of the offenders to see that they have done anything wrong. William L. Taylor, a former Republican state chairman in Florida, and now one of Florida's two representatives on the Republican National Committee, received more than $500,000 in cash and property from developers to obtain favors from Samuel Pierce, even writing to Pierce and his executive assistant, Deborah Gore Dean, on RNC stationery. Before a House subcommittee, he said, "I saw nothing wrong with it. . . . I wouldn't say that in the future I wouldn't do it in exactly the same way." He was sharply rebuked by Republican Representative Christopher Shays, who said of him and his partner, a former Reagan appointee: "They were involved in a dirty, smelly, slimy business, and they made millions off the taxpayers because of their relationship with the agency." When will there be a stop to this now habitual betrayal of the public trust?

SOME OF US GREW UP WHEN government service was considered to be its own reward. The most a British civil servant expected after even a lifetime's service to the public good was a few initials after his name. An official or a minister almost never went straight from government into the private sector in the very field in which he could exploit his official contacts. The blatant conflict-of-interest scandals in the administrations of FDR, Truman, JFK, LBJ, and Carter were few and far between. Eisenhower's chief of staff, Sherman Adams, was forced to resign for little more than accepting a coat made from vicuña, the lustrous wool of a wild ruminant in the Andes. But what were we to expect of Reagan, a president who advertised that private gain is more meritorious than public service? And is his successor any less indifferent to the "dirty, smelly, slimy business" that politically appointed Republicans have brought to Washington?

THE OFFICIALS WORK IN OFFICES adorned with the flag of the United States. Bush worries about the flag. He would even amend the Constitution, tamper for the first time with the Bill of Rights, to deter its desecration by some paltry poltroon, but not the trampling of it by those who, under it, swear to serve the public good. And Lee Atwater, leering, sly in face, word, and deed, he worries about the flag. Bush allowed him to dirty the campaign last year. President Bush now acquiesces in his dirtying of the White House, the Republican Party, and politics. If the flag means what Bush and Atwater seem to think, burn it. As an immigrant resident I can often be moved by the American flag. There is no braver sight in Washington than the circle of Stars and Stripes around the Washington Monument, representing the 50 states, especially when they are whipping in a stiff wind. The flag seems so clean, its promise still so defiant. Who now soils it? Let it speak for itself.

AND THAT, APPARENTLY, IS WHAT the American people are saying. After a short puff of indignation at the Supreme Court ruling, they seem to be deciding that the flag means little to them if it does not represent the guarantees in the Constitution. Republican as well as Democratic members of Congress report that their mail on Bush's proposed amendment has changed its tenor. (Although that hasn't stopped them from introducing legislation forbidding flag desecration.) Who suggested to Bush that he stand before the Iwo Jima Memorial and vaunt that he was defending the flag? Nothing could have been more certain to get the people's backs up. If the flag amendment becomes an issue in the midterm elections, it will defeat Republicans. There is also encouraging evidence that the party's right wing is carrying the party, and the president, too far in its resistance to *Roe* v. *Wade*. Opinion polls on this fraught issue have to be read carefully. Many people dislike abortion; I do, for one. That does not mean that they think government, federal or state, should dictate to women, especially poor, very young, and distressed women, whether they can choose to have a safe abortion. I have argued my case to friends who have had abortions; I simply will not impose my views in so personal a decision, or sanction by my vote any government to do it for me. And that, I believe, is the opinion of the majority of the eventually sane and steady American people.

IN SHORT, THERE IS GATHERING evidence that the poisonous politics of "values" is losing its drawing power. Most people look after their own values, thank you very much, and inculcate them into their children, who reinterpret and refresh them. Free people do not need or like nannying, and nannying government is what the Republican Party is pushing. Nannying government is one of the persistent *Tory* criticisms of Mrs. Thatcher's regime. She even tried to invade the English pub, in the name of competition, to change the time-honored relationship between publicans and the brewers, and was smartly slapped down for her pains by the sturdy, quaffing yeomen of England. "Ah, the governess!" Disraeli once said when the prim John Stuart Mill rose in the Commons to lecture it, the nation, Europe, the universe, eternity. Mrs. T., sharp-nosed, purse-lipped, has even tried to be governess to Europe. It is revolting *to* her; now it is revolting *against* her. Republicans here should pay close attention to the steep decline in her popularity, plausibility, and ability to carry even her own party with her. In response to the slippage, she has reshuffled her Cabinet, promoting the more moderate, decent conservatives. It will not be enough. It may even be that the shallow "conservatism" that has seemed to sweep America, Britain, and Europe for the last ten years is gasping for breath.

HENRY FAIRLIE

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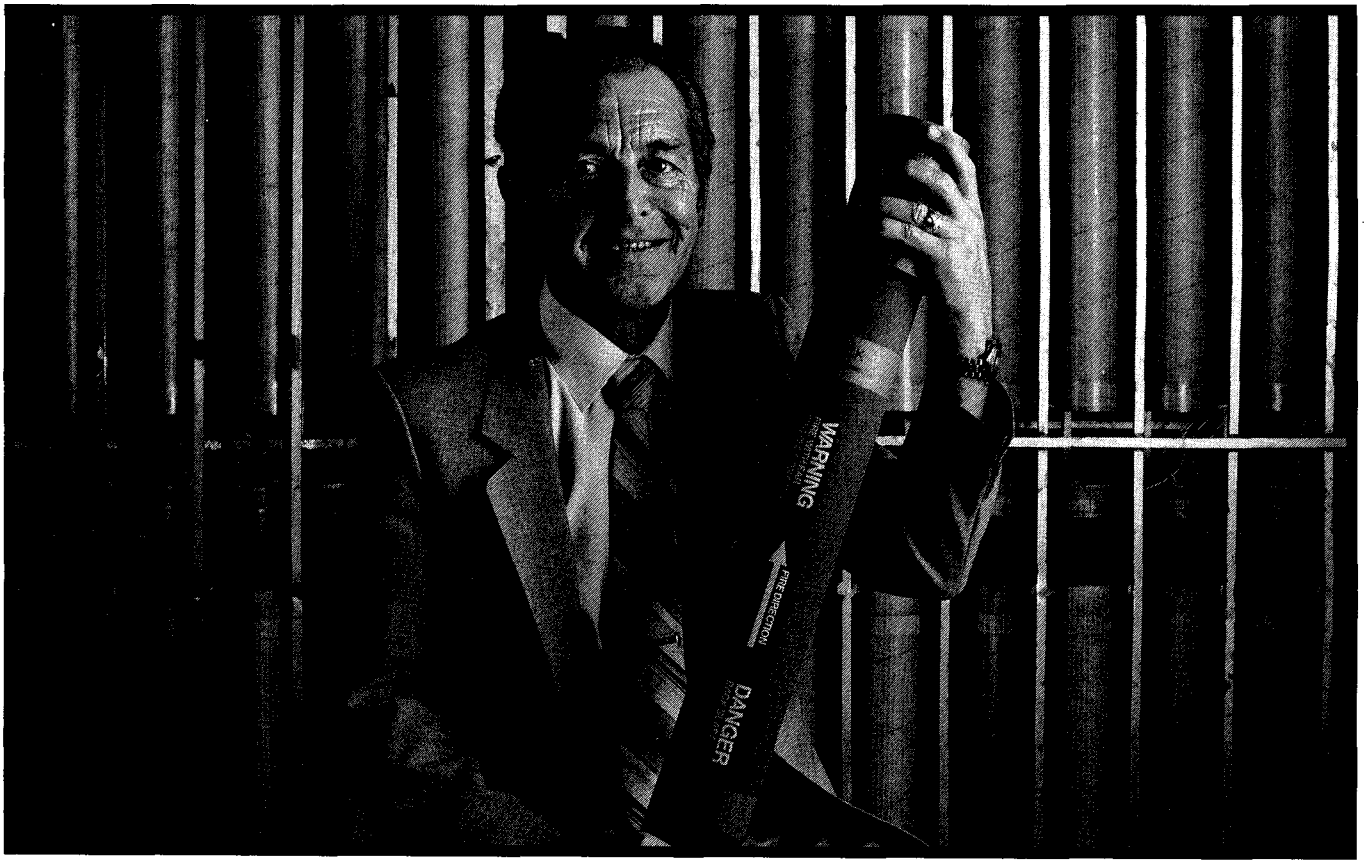

"It was one of those vacuum-sealed coffee bags that started me on a better way to coat our rocket containers.

I tore my thumbnail trying to open one and got to thinking how tough that bag was. Made of some sort of aluminized material. Moisture proof, too. And the printing was sharp and colorful. Using a covering like that, I figured we could stop sending our containers out for their zinc coating—and we could have the instructions neatly printed on instead of stenciling them by hand.

It worked like a beauty. And it's so much better at deflecting electromagnetic interference we were able to eliminate three electronic parts in the container.

I still keep that old coffee bag on my desk. It's a reminder to me that good ideas can crop up just about anywhere." *–Danny Lascelles, SMAW rocket launcher, Value Engineer*

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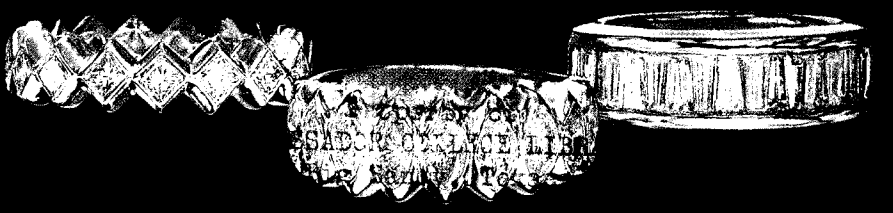
Fifth Anniversary. Sixth Anniversary. Seventh Anniversary. Eighth Anniversary. Ninth Anniversary.

She does enjoy all the cookbooks you've given her. But she now has three more than the Library of Congress.



This year, tell her you'd marry her all over again. The Diamond Anniversary Band.

A diamond is forever.

Unigem

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